

TRAINING SPIRITUALLY CONNECTED AND SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS  
STUDENTS AGES ELEVEN TO NINETEEN TO POSITIVELY  
IMPACT THEIR COMMUNITIES

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **TRAINING SPIRITUALLY CONNECTED AND SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS STUDENTS AGES ELEVEN TO NINETEEN TO POSITIVELY IMPACT THEIR COMMUNITIES**

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#### **Mentors**

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The context of this project is Mt. Zion Progressive Missionary Baptist Church (MZPMBC) in St. Petersburg, Florida. The church is located in an impoverished area called Midtown. The community not only needs the message of Jesus, it can also benefit from charitable acts of kindness. The focus of the project is training students to impact their communities by being spiritually connected and socially conscious. The hypothesis embraces their spiritual and social development in changing their community via a four-week training program that teaches spiritual and social responsibility. Outcomes are students who are followers of Jesus and community change makers.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my ancestors who had a stony road to trod and a bitter chastening rod, to those who tasted death but yet live on in my heart, Frank Alexander Clark, Ruby Lee Clark, Brenda Thomas, Elton Thomas, and Erico Reed. I am exceedingly thankful for the love and support of Nik, Kaziyah, Amyah, Jayla, Henry, and Chosyn, each of you make life worth living. To my amazing siblings, Kesha, Latoya, Angel, Otis (Jet), Otisha, my twin Shawna (Poohnie), Quanterrious (Bam), and George (Wes), each of you have supported me in unimaginable ways. To Yvonne (Auntie Sookie), for always putting my name before God. I am appreciative to Harriet (Mom) for always treating me like a son, and Azzie Lee (Nana) for claiming me as your own. My life is blessed because of each of you.

To my pastors, Reverend Earnest Jones, Dr. Wayne G. Thompson, Reverend Louis M. Murphy, and Reverend Jeffrey A. Johnson, God used your light to make my path brighter.

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To my Doctor of Ministry Group, each of you made the weeks away from home more bearable. To my brothers beloved, Tim, Jay, Marco, Wright, Mark, Onae, Brandon, and Lancaster, glad to be a preacher at the same time as you all. To the family and friends

whose names I could spend the width of this book naming, thank you for allowing me to share the road of life with you.

And finally, again, and always to the one whose price is far above rubies, my wife, Nik. You have supported me step by step. Wherever this life takes me, I pray it never takes me away from the beauty of your smile, the strength of your will, the work of your hands, the fragrance of your love, the hold of your hand, the kiss of your lips, the gentleness of your hug, the forgiveness of your heart, the fight of your determination, or the preciousness of your presence, for you my heart longs.

## **DEDICATION**

This research work is dedicated to several people who have been influential in my life. Initially, Pastor Louis M. Murphy, without your generosity, I could not have done this Doctor of Ministry Journey. Also, Dr. Wayne G. Thompson, without your generosity, I would not have done this Doctor of Ministry Journey. Finally, to Nik always, without your generosity, I could not do this life's journey.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The ministry focus, biblical, historical, theological and theoretical chapters along with the project analysis are all the foundational pillars for which the Doctor of Ministry project will stand. Each part is uniquely important in its own way. None of the chapters are any more important than another but all are necessary. The project training spiritually connected and socially conscious students (eleven to nineteen) to positively impact their communities is built to stand because of the ministry focus, foundational chapters, and project analysis.

Chapter one will define the ministry context where the youth leadership project was implemented. The context for this project is Mt. Zion Progressive Missionary Baptist Church in the Midtown area of St. Petersburg, Florida. The researcher is the Pastor of Students. In this chapter, the reader will be introduced to the rationale for this project and how and why implementing a youth leadership development program focused on training spiritually connected and socially conscious students is critical for the church. The researcher believes that the revival of the church will not occur from the top down but from the bottom up. It will also identify commonalities of the researcher's spiritual journey and the life of his context as a basis for providing such a vital ministry.

Chapter two will allow the reader to understand the biblical foundations that undergird the validity of this project. The idea of justice is one that threads itself throughout the entirety of the Christian text, both Old and New Testaments. One would

assume from the common theme in the text that God is concerned a great deal with just behavior and treatment by His people specifically, but all people in general. The theme of justice seems to not only be one that covers the biblical text, but also the way that God operates in the world. This is the reason why the biblical foundations chapter is so important to this project because it informs students from the perspective of God as recorded in scripture on how they should operate in the world.

Chapter three will give the reader a historical perspective on the work of this project. The project examines the transformational movement of The Religious Society of Friends. It was during the mid-sixteenth century that George Fox started The Religious Society of Friends or Quakers. Almost immediately this new movement's teaching was at odds with those of mainstream society thus creating opposition and then persecution. This sort of opposition and persecution would become the identity of The Religious Society of Friends. This is important to this project because it gives the participants a look at other groups of Christian people who used their spiritual identity to go counterculture and be conscious socially.

Chapter four will give the reader a theological foundation for this project. The theological foundation for "Training Spiritually Connected and Socially Conscious Students Ages Eleven to Nineteen to Positively Impact their Communities" is The Social Gospel Movement. This movement was started in America in the late nineteenth, early twentieth century and sought to address the injustices that existed in this country after the civil war. The issues that The Social Gospel Movement addressed was vast; but the movement knew that if they were going to be authentic followers of Jesus then they had to speak truth to power. The participants of the project will find the theological

perspective important because unlike the historical, it does not address social issues, but it examines those issues specifically in America. This will affirm for the participants the necessity of speaking and practicing God's truth in this culture.

Chapter five is the interdisciplinary chapter. The chapter focuses on the discipline of sociology and the work of Christian Smith who deals with the sociology of emerging adults. The theme of sociology in emerging adults as an important piece in the puzzle of the project because it helps the researcher to understand the focus of his work is accurate and the age bracket sought after provides the best range for lifelong implementation.

In chapter six, the reader will be exposed to the project methodology. This chapter outlines how the pre and post-test and other preliminary activities conducted contributed to the success of this project. Chapter six will also outline the timeline and the step-by-step process of how this new youth leadership program emerged and was implemented. There will be an explanation of the field experience to communicate what actually happened when the project was implemented. Lastly, the reader will gain insight into the researcher's reflections, summary and concluding remarks.



## CHAPTER ONE

### MINISTRY FOCUS

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is perhaps one of my favorite people throughout history. He literally used his platform of spiritual and social consciousness to change the culture of America. All of this was done from an awareness that had been shaped and formed by foundational beliefs in Christ and an understanding of God's working in the world. A third-generation Baptist preacher and follower of Jesus changed society. This has always amazed me because Dr. King did not allow his strong convictions in Jesus to cause him to have social apathy towards its woes. This is important to me and my project because I believe this is the true essence of Christianity and those that follow authentically must be involved as Jesus was in the social aspects of his ministry. This is the nature of what true prophets of the biblical writ, as well as more contemporary voices like that of Dr. King, do when speaking truth to power for God's sake.

Obery M. Hendricks, Jr. says in his book *The Politics of Jesus: Rediscovering the True Revolutionary Nature of Jesus' Teachings and How They Have Been Corrupted*:

The uncompromising example of Jesus Christ places upon every Christian minister the responsibility to withstand the temptation to align oneself with the secular ruling powers. It is true that it is part of every minister's calling to be a pastor to his or her parishioners, to be a spiritual leader and teacher and a comforter of the sick at heart and those afflicted in mind, soul, spirit, or body. Ministers of the Gospel must comfort the afflicted, but they also have the prophet's duty to afflict the comfortable.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Obery Hendricks, *The Politics of Jesus: Rediscovering the True Revolutionary Nature of Jesus' Teachings and How They Have Been Corrupted* (New York, NY: Doubleday Religion, 2006), 33.

This, in essence, is what I believe genuine followers of the Messiah must be about if they are going to make the message of Jesus of any real effect and connect with its ability to transform society.

Dr. King also employed the bodies of teenagers in his acts of civil disobedience for the sake of social change. This is equally as important to my project because I would like to create models of learning by which we can teach teens to impact their communities spiritually and socially with an authentic message of Jesus's love and demand for equality as Dr. King did. I feel that the more we move away from the terror of Jim Crow south and the brutality of dogs attacking people, water hoses sprayed, and patty wagons filled, the more apathetic we become to our Christian responsibility to sound the alarm while being the moral consciousness of society. This apathy intensifies as heat does the more we rise out of the ashes of blatant oppression to the point where many Christians do not believe that the church, pulpit, or religion itself is the place for addressing social injustice and political dishonesty. However, I believe that we have the ability to again change and ignite generations of Christian teens who are now living in the Black Lives Matter Movement and social media age by having them see the true nature of their relationship with Jesus and its insistence of social change.

One's strengths and weaknesses toward agreed upon goals and the realization of a divine vision requires veracious analysis of both the leader and the team they lead. These analyses should lead to the identification of the strong points of a leader and the needs and resources of a team or ministry. Once the abilities of a team leader are identified and the needs of a team or ministry are uncovered, a plan must be developed; and a process

implemented to correlate those two areas in a manner that leads to a successful solution of the need(s) discovered. This correlation or point of intersection is known as synergy. Synergy is defined as the interaction or cooperation of two or more organizations, substances, or other agents to produce a combined effect greater than the sum of their separate effects.<sup>2</sup> This, in essence, is what happens when a team leader identifies their abilities through spiritual reflection and recognizes the needs of ministries through investigation, then they seek to join the two to get an outcome greater than either could have individually achieved.

This chapter will discuss the point of synergy between providential gifts and abilities uncovered in the spiritual autobiography of Shawn E. E. Thomas and the ministry needs to be seen in the contextual analysis of Mt. Zion Progressive Church in general and its One80 Teen Ministry, specifically. This chapter will also explore how that point of synergy will form the basis for a Doctor of Ministry project. Finally, this chapter will provide a hypothesis and theme statement for the ministerial project.

Mt. Zion Progressive Missionary Baptist Church is eighty-nine-years old and sits in the heart of the African American community in St. Petersburg, Florida. The founding year of the church is 1928 and was the product of a split from First Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church. The members that left First Mt. Zion were not happy with the lack of community involvement and the deficiency of progressiveness in the church arena. This small group of members thought that the theme of progressiveness should be within the very fabric and DNA of the church's identity hence the name "Progressive" in the church's title. For many years, Mt. Zion Progressive was a part of associations and

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<sup>2</sup> "Synergy," Google, accessed December 19, 2018, <https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=synergy&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>.

unions, but eventually pulled out, again because of the lack of progressiveness of those organizations. In essence, Mt. Zion Progressive has tried to make a good attempt throughout its history to stay true to its progressive theme. One way that Mt. Zion has been authentic to its call is by calling pastors who have been heavily involved in the community and strived to progress through social awareness. Several of the pastors who have been particularly influential in this way are Reverend's Louis McCree, Wilkins Garrett, and Louis Murphy.

Reverend McCree moved up through the ranks from church clerk, choir president, Sunday School Superintendent, Trustee, Deacon, Assistant Pastor, and finally Pastor in 1946.<sup>3</sup> Having held several positions in the church worked to his advantage and aided him in launching the vision. During the thirty-four years of service to Mt. Zion Progressive, Reverend McCree oversaw the completion of the new sanctuary, construction of a new annex, installation of modern kitchen equipment, creation of a kindergarten, purchase of a van to start transporting members, and acquiring of three lots for membership parking and future expansion.<sup>4</sup> One of Reverend McCree's most significant accomplishments was opening up a daycare for families in the community. Once again, this was a way that Mt. Zion Progressive could be "progressive" in its approach to engaging the community not just in spiritual life but also socially. It was a great intermingling of secular and religious teaching while also providing affordable and competent care for the underemployed or unemployed black people in the community.

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<sup>3</sup> Gypsy Gallardo, *Mt. Zion 85<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Book* (St. Petersburg, FL: Mt. Zion Progressive Missionary Baptist Church, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Gallardo, *Mt. Zion 85<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Book*.

Reverend McCree's time ended when he died unexpectedly in 1980. The same year that Reverend McCree died, Mt. Zion Progressive called Reverend Wilkins Garrett, Jr. to serve as their fifth pastor. Rev. Garrett had strong teaching and preaching which helped sustain the spiritual tradition of Mt. Zion Progressive; but he also led the church in social life as well by placing an enormous emphasis on community engagement and outreach. Under Reverend Garrett's leadership, a new state of the art sanctuary was built in 1990 complete with 800 seats, digital media, office space, a gymnasium, and classrooms. A human service building, as well as a family life center, was constructed adjacent to the sanctuary. These buildings were constructed to better reach and serve the hurting and helpless members of society. It seemed to be clear that the brick and mortar buildings were just a means to an end to do more social ministry. Through grants and partnerships, Reverend Garrett enhanced Mt. Zion Progressive's ability to meet the educational, financial, affordable housing, and social needs of members.<sup>5</sup>

Alternative and afterschool educational programs were created to combat the low success level in the public school system. The kids who were rejected from traditional schooling were allowed to be a part of Mt. Zion's alternative schooling. The Genesis Program built houses for low-income families so that the underprivileged could share in the dream of homeownership. There were also foreign outreach missions conducted with the Caribbean World Mission, Ethiopian Ministries, Haiti Ministries, and the Virgin Islands Missions. Reverend Garrett also helped found the Interfaith Ministerial Alliance

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<sup>5</sup> Gallardo, *Mt. Zion 85th Anniversary Book*.

(IMA) Credit Union with other local pastors.<sup>6</sup> The goal was that the least in the community could get loans, pay less interest, and build a great financial future.

In 1999, Mt. Zion Progressive received its sixth and current Pastor, Reverend Louis Murphy, Sr. He came at a time when the congregation needed healing after hurting times under the past administration. Reverend Murphy came and cast a vision that has helped increase the membership and became a force in community outreach and political activism. This allowed Mt. Zion to become recognizable to all of the political and civic leaders and helped her forge for those with political aspirations. Under that vision, Mt. Zion Progressive purchased several lots adjacent to the church property and was instrumental in bringing a credit union and grocer to the community which again provides services to underprivileged families that would not otherwise be offered. They also retired the church's mortgage in 2006 so that more money would be focused towards helping those that are hurting in the community. Reverend Murphy's vision caused the opening of the Mt. Zion Christian Academy in 2012; and a preschool is being sustained under the leadership. The Christian Academy builds upon the idea that if we can get our children as early as possible and continue to pour into them over years, then we can begin to literally change our communities and the children in those communities into social and spiritual agents of change.

I explored and highlighted these pastors and their contribution to show how Mt. Zion Progressive has been about social change through spiritual means for all of its history. This fact may then cause one to wonder the need of the context. Although Mt. Zion Progressive has used their spirituality to lead social change, they still have two

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<sup>6</sup> Gallardo, *Mt. Zion 85th Anniversary Book*.

needs that arise within the very framework of what they do. The first is that Mt. Zion Progressive has always had a strong teen ministry just by the mere numbers but has not strongly emphasized the necessity of teens being equipped to lead change. The teen's faith or expression, especially as it relates to social involvement and change, has been relegated to Sunday and Wednesday worship. Secondly, Mt. Zion teens have not been taught to see how spiritual newness has to lead to social involvement. Neither is absent of the other, rather an authentic follower of Jesus lives to simultaneously affect both areas. Since this sort of teaching has not taken place, consequently there has been no identifying of social woes that directly affect teens in Mt. Zion Progressive and more so the city and thus no hands-on involvement in the challenging and changing of those woes.

For these reasons, my project will focus on training teens to positively affect their communities by being spiritually connected and socially conscious. I hypothesize that if I can effectively achieve this goal then three important things will happen. First, teens will connect in a very real way their faith in Jesus to their responsibilities to be managers of change. Secondly, there will be a real impact on the community especially within a two-mile radius of our church. Thirdly, I believe these teens will lead to change and make the future of the church brighter and better. I feel that I have life experiences as well as professional and educational development that has equipped me to lead this training and be sensitive enough to the population so I can relate.

First, I spent most of my childhood involved in the child or teen ministry. I loved and still do love everything about the traditional church where I grew up. I was raised and spiritually nurtured at the Galilee Missionary Baptist Church in St. Petersburg, Florida under the pastoral leadership of Reverend Ernest Jones. Reverend Jones has been my

pastor all of my life. He served and still serves that church today even though he is in his 80's. Reverend Jones was best friends with my grandfather, so he not only played the role of pastor to me; but he was also a father figure. He taught me just as much about manhood as he did about ministry.

Galilee was completely traditional in every sense of the word and I treasured those times. I can still hear Deacon Joe Salvage leading the choir procession down the aisle while singing "We're Marching Up to Zion, That Beautiful City of God." Then Deacon Lindburg Lindsey would lead devotion by the ole school lining of hymns with "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." Next Deacon Henry Williams who was also the Sunday school Bible reviewer would get down on one knee and pray prayers that were always scripturally based. After choir selections, offerings, pulpit prayers, and consecration or preparation hymns, my old pastor would get up for "preaching time." If I was lucky and he was feeling it, he would sing before the sermon. I would play, write, or sleep most of the sermon but then when I heard the tune in my pastor's voice change and the deacons and deaconess encouraging him on, I would stop everything, sit up, and gaze into the pulpit for the close. He would always put Jesus on the cross, take Him off the cross, put Him in the tomb, raising Him from the tomb, and put Him on a cloud and send him back to heaven before reminding us that he was coming back. I absolutely loved it.

As I stated earlier, church for me was more than Sunday morning, rather it engulfed my whole life. I had to attend drill team practice, youth summer session, Vacation Bible School, choir rehearsal, and all other youth-related activities. Although I had to attend church a lot, again, I enjoyed every moment of it. Even as a child, I lived and longed for church anniversary in February, revival in July, and duals day in



September. It was my life as a child and although I did not understand the complete significance of it then, I realize now that if we can build the same authentic faith in teens, it will help them to have a strong foundational God consciousness; and that will help sustain them in the future and we will go a long way in making sure that they have the spiritual aptitude to affect community. It was then and is now the spiritual connectedness that has created a burn in me to love and care for and about humanity. I think that it is important to give teens a solid foundation like I had that will ultimately sustain them throughout life but more specifically will empower them to create positive change in their community.

Secondly, I have spent most of my adult life in teen, youth, or student ministry. I got my first job in ministry at Pleasant Grove Baptist Church as Youth Pastor. Pleasant Grove had just transitioned its church from the pastor who had served there for forty-six-years to his grandson who was twenty-six-years-old. The younger new pastor wanted to contemporize the church, so I could use all of the imagination possible to do cutting edge ministry and the financial resources were available to meet this goal in the beginning. This was the beginning of a calling which still exists even until now. This was when I first fell in love with cultivating the growth of children and teens. It was amazing to be able to make real the life and ministry of Jesus in the hearts of young Christians. They were like sponges that soaked up all the teachings and love that there was to give. I was able to implement ministries and build relationships that last to the current day. I served that church for about two and a half years before it split.

After my time at Pleasant Grove, I simultaneously served as youth coordinator for my home church Galilee and for our Baptist Association, Union Foreign. This, of course,

was a more traditional setting similar to what I grew up in. There was a desire to serve youth in theory or only for the sake of tradition, but not in practice. There were great ideas about ministry opportunities and activities for the teens but never any resources invested or followed through on assignments. However, even in that environment, teens experienced personal and spiritual growth. This speaks to the resilience of teens which makes ministry with them achievable. Even in the worst situations or circumstances, ones where there is not adequate space, facilities, or financial resources, teens can not only grow and develop, but they can actually thrive. This is evidential proof to me that if you teach teens life principles about their spiritual and social responsibilities, they will not only soak them in and develop them; they will also use them to reach and set goals for community change.

Thirdly, I started seminary at the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) in August 2011. Attending ITC was one of the greatest decisions of my life. It changed me forever. My thinking towards ministry, the Bible, and its interpretation completely changed on this journey. There were ideas and positions that I took that were challenged all the time. There were biblical concepts that were challenged that I had not thought about in scripture. This sort of deep critique of the scriptures turned some people away but I embraced it as a means of growth. Another aspect that was perhaps identical to ITC was the strong stance on social justice. I had seen marches and for a long time been an admirer of Dr. Martin King, Jr. but I had never taken the issues of injustices so serious as to march and participate in rallies. This ignited a fire deep within to actively fight for the justice that we all deserve. I had never tied so strongly the teachings and life of Jesus to social justices. I was asked to see Jesus in a way that I had not quite seen him before. I

was shown the gospels in a light that was amazingly brilliant. I no longer saw the gospel and social justice as separate; rather I now understood that feeding, clothing, visiting people, and standing up for justice against oppressive powers were within the very fabric of the gospel. ITC changed not only my thinking and application of the Bible, but it literally shaped my worldview of what Christian ministry is about.

As a result of all of the stops along my journey, especially that of ITC, I was led and inspired to introduce a motto at Mt. Zion by which we would do children and youth ministry. The motto is spiritually connected, socially conscious, smart and cultured. I wanted to be sure that our children and youth were being transformed into genuine followers of Jesus by doing ministry the way Jesus did his ministry. I want to ensure that youth have a real relationship with Jesus Christ. Pleasant Grove taught me that there needs to be more than church attendance or religion, but there has to be a relationship. I want to also ensure that they know what goes on in their communities and are active in doing something about it. Jesus arrived on the scene when his people the Jews were oppressed by the Roman government and Jesus spoke out against this injustice and took care of the needs of the disenfranchised. Lastly, I want to make sure that they are educated and well rounded.

The intermingling of my life experiences, ministry opportunities, and professional development has uniquely equipped me to be sensitive to relevant ministry programs that applies and appeals to teens. My exposure also helps me to use my ministry experience to engage teens, and finally I am able to use my educational matriculation to build real programs that will lead change for teens and ultimately the community. Our students who are very much a part of our community come from a multiplicity of different

backgrounds and households, but all are in some way or another affected by the poverty that lives in our community and the context.

Mt. Zion Progressive is located at 955 20<sup>th</sup> Street South in the Midtown area of St. Petersburg, Florida. The city of St. Petersburg sits on a peninsula on a peninsula. Florida is a peninsula meaning that it is surrounded by three bodies of water, but St. Petersburg is also within itself surrounded by three bodies of water. The total population of St. Petersburg is 252,372 with 68.7% being white and 24.4% being black. Forty-five to fifty-four-year-olds make up the greatest group of people followed by zero to fourteen-year-olds. The average income throughout the city is \$62,506 but is much lower in the poverty-stricken areas of the Southside. The highest level of education category is a high school diploma at 28.4%, followed by some college at 21.7%, and then a bachelor's degree at 18.5%.<sup>7</sup> Again, this is true that for the general consensus population but not so for the black populations who are lagging behind in almost every positive category.

The Midtown community is mostly black populated and has historically been home to the majority of African American life and culture. During the 1920s, Midtown was the area where greats like Louis Armstrong would come to perform. Naturally, because of this, Midtown is also the place where the predominance of black professionals lived. To the contrary, it also is home to the highest concentration of black crime as well. There was national attention given in the newspaper in August 2015 called *Failure Factories* concerning failing schools in Pinellas County. The article written by three writers says:

In just eight years, Pinellas County School Board members turned five schools in the country's black neighborhoods into some of the worst in Florida. First, they

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<sup>7</sup> "Data and Demographics," City of St. Petersburg, accessed December 13, 2017, [http://www.stpete.org/economic\\_development\\_dept/statistical\\_market\\_data/docs/statistic/Demographics](http://www.stpete.org/economic_development_dept/statistical_market_data/docs/statistic/Demographics).

abandoned integration, leaving the schools overwhelmingly poor and black. Then they broke promises of more money and resources. Then as black children started failing at outrageous rates, as overstressed teachers walked off the job, as middle-class families fled en masse- the board stood by and did nothing.<sup>8</sup>

All five of those schools are located in the predominately black section of St. Petersburg with most in the Midtown area. This is the contextual location of our ministry. Until recently, within the last eight years, the scene in Mt. Zion Progressive's neighborhood was that of dilapidated houses, abandoned buildings, closed stores and restaurants, and poverty. There has been a recent attempt on the part of community organizations and government support to revitalize the area. Now you can see businesses opening up and houses getting makeovers. You can also see more of the white population moving into the community. To the contrary, there are very affluent neighborhoods that are a world away from the Midtown struggle complete with high rise condominiums, boat docks, manicured grass, and expensive cars. These areas exist literally blocks away from the Midtown area of our community where our church sits.

This context is in severe need of teens that have been trained to positively impact their communities by being spiritually connected and socially conscious. I have begun primarily teaching this message and preparing this training through various methods. One way I have begun achieving this goal is through teaching the word of God into the hearts of the teens. Through explanation and examples of scriptures, we are showing our teens the responsibility of each believer to live out their faith in social ways. The primary scripture that is used to lead this teaching is Luke 4:18, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim

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<sup>8</sup> Nathaniel Lash, "Failure Factories," *Tampa Bay Times*, accessed December 14, 2017, <http://www.tampabay.com/news/education/three-of-five-failure-factories-improve-school-grades/2284657>.

freedom for the prisoners and recovery sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free.”<sup>9</sup> I intend to use this scripture to show the evidential proof of the Lord’s spirit being upon a person. The teens understand that once they receive God’s gift, they have the Lord’s spirit, and when the Lord’s spirit is on them, their response should be similar to that of Jesus, which is to give to the poor people good news, give freedom to those in prison, open the eyes of those that cannot see, and give liberation to oppressed people. Thus, continued teaching and the highlight of their responsibility as believers and authentic followers of Jesus helps make teens sensitive to what they should really be about in their Christian formation.

Another way we have begun the process of training teens to positively impact their communities by being spiritually connected and socially conscious is through small focus groups on relevant social issues and solutions. These groups have open and guided dialogue that is meant to be solution based through the lens of teens that are either directly or indirectly affected by the social woes. Two other examples of this besides the failing school problem are teen auto theft and homelessness. Both of these are issues that are front page in our community. There is an epidemic that is on the rise in our area involving teens stealing cars and wrecking them or worst dying in fiery crashes.

In March 2016, three teen girls, ages fifteen and sixteen died when their car crashed into a retention pond.<sup>10</sup> In August 2017, three teen boys were killed in a stolen

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<sup>9</sup> Biblical citations within this document are from the New Revised Standard Version unless stated otherwise, Luke 4:18.

<sup>10</sup> “Three Teens Dead in Stolen Car that Crashed into St. Pete Pond,” *Fox News*, accessed December 14, 2017, <http://www.fox13news.com/news/local-news/three-teens-dead-in-stolen-car-that-crashed-into-st-pete-pond>.

car crash while driving 117 miles per hour.<sup>11</sup> Both of these cases involved individuals who are the same age as the teens that attend Mt. Zion Progressive's youth group. Therefore, it was important to sit them down and say based off of the tragedies involving teens your age, what should your response be as Christians? That focus group produced the ideas of larger interdependent rallies, forums, and dialogues with teens, police and sheriff agency, and mentoring programs that will help lead social change in that area.

The second problem is that of homelessness. Again, many of the population of those that are homeless are teens and many are known to our students. Another time we meet with the small teen focus groups and discussed what responsibility we have to this social issue. This issue was highlighted in a June 2017 article that said:

They are living on our streets and in our parking lots, in cheap motels and spare bedrooms if they're lucky and in old cars, if they are not. Their kids attend our schools, and parents often are afraid to seek help. Pinellas County has made progress in recent years in providing temporary shelter for the homeless, but homeless families with kids are virtually shut out. It's a crisis that requires public and private leadership to find an answer that is both compassionate and cost-effective.<sup>12</sup>

The article went on to say that there are about 12,000 homeless people in our county, many in our city, and some in the radius of our church. I challenged teens to use their faith and scriptures like Matthew 25:31-40 in its context to be active in addressing the issues of the day especially specifically homelessness.

Out of this focus group came a ministry opportunity called Servefest where teens identified a neighborhood that had a high population of homelessness and teens so they

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<sup>11</sup> Taylor Telford, "Three Boys Died in a Stolen Vehicle: Here's How it Unfolded (w/video)," *Tampa Bay Times*, accessed December 14, 2017, <http://www.tampabay.com/news/three-boys-died-in-a-stolen-vehicle-sunday-heres-how-it-unfolded/2333068>.

<sup>12</sup> "Editorial: Pinellas Cannot Ignore Homeless Families," *Tampa Bay Times*, accessed June 23, 2017, <https://www.tampabay.com/opinion/editorials/editorial-pinellas-cannot-ignore-homeless-families/2328289>.

could for one day adopt that neighborhood. On one Saturday in March, 2018, hundreds of teens took over the streets of that community with many mission activities such as planting a garden at an assisted living facility, doing yard work for the elderly of that community, providing services at a nursing home in the community, passing out clothes and hygiene products to the homeless that were from that area and delivering items to other areas of high homeless populations. These focus groups helped the teens to connect their teaching of Jesus to the following of Jesus. There is a direct line from teaching, focus groups, to actually carrying out social activities. Out of this process came A Ministry of Social Students (AMOSS) which is our teen social justice ministry.

I have seen in my life how the training that I received, even though it lacked method, has helped lead me to positively impact my community. I wonder how much more impactful I could have been and how much better my community would have benefited if I would have received methodical and specific training on how I should use the gospel and my convictions to make social change in my surroundings.

Unfortunately, the gospel that I was given was limited only to spiritual matters. My experience was that of Obery Hendricks in his book *The Politics of Jesus* writes “black Christians can be some of the most religious conservative people in America. My parents certainly were. Like everyone else, in my world, it seemed, who knew only of a long-suffering Jesus who was concerned with the things of heaven, with little thought for the matters of this world, matters like social justice, racial and gender inequalities, or the systematic oppression of the poor.”<sup>13</sup> This was my religious constraints as a teen Christian, therefore I wish to release teens from this confinement.

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<sup>13</sup> Hendricks, *The Politics of Jesus*, 3.



My goal is to shape teens in their communities and ultimately the world by building a bridge between their understandings of the scriptures and how those teachings have a direct impact on their concern for the least, lost, and left behind. The impact of their experience has to influence them to make a life of social change. My context is in great need of a generation of teens who will be bold and brave enough to get trained to positively impact their communities by being spiritually connected and socially conscious. My personal life experiences, professional development, and educational matriculation have uniquely equipped me to lead teens in this change.

Doug Fields, the author of *Purpose Driven Youth Ministry* says, “The students in your youth ministry don’t need your clever ideas and great programming skills. They need a living model—a man or woman of God who is passionate about his or her faith.”<sup>14</sup> A fire has been ignited in me through my life experiences, professional development and experience, and education. It has made me passionate about using my faith to impact the lives of youth and ultimately help them to become passionate to also live out their faith by being the gospel rather than merely reading it. I do not want to raise another generation of teens that spend their whole lives listening to or around the gospel but never get around to living the gospel. This is happening in too many of our churches and congregations. It is being vicariously represented in the pulpit. It is losing its way in the culture of prosperity. The struggle to save humanity has just been simplified to spirituality only to the point where churches, preachers, missionaries, and evangelist, will not ever address the society and culture in which the historical Jesus spoke truth to social power.

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<sup>14</sup> Doug Fields, *Purpose Driven Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan HarperCollins, 2009), 53.

Obery Hendricks again helps with this concept when he says:

Nevertheless, in too many churches today dramatic predictions about individuals' unique personal concerns are presented as God-inspired "prophecies" by clergy who have never spoken out against social injustice, never uttered a word of political critique, yet still call themselves prophets. Some even charge fees or request financial "love-offerings" for their "prophetic" services. Despite their claims to prophetic powers, these men and women must be considered false prophets. Yet this is not a new phenomenon; there have been false prophets throughout history, and there are many today. How can a false prophet be identified? There are two telltale criteria: (1) they are silent about issues of social justice, and (2) they function as uncritical supporters of rulers and politicians, rather than as their moral conscience and dedicated arbiters of biblical justice.<sup>15</sup>

This is the culture of church, more so Christians that I am trying to change, rather, I believe that we can train an awesome and sensitive generation of teens who will not only accept the Lord Jesus as Savior but will also accept Jesus' calling to bring about social reformation throughout all communities and areas of the world. After all, it was Jesus who showed us the way through his living that your spiritual aptitude should influence your social attitude.

I seek to learn through my Doctor of Ministry project how we as a church community can change the social climate of our world through the training of teens that have a spiritual connection with Jesus Christ and have seen how that connection calls them to be concerned about their neighbors. If this goal is obtained, then we may be able to replicate our ministry throughout this country and thus change a whole generation of teens who will change the world.

In conclusion, I am confident that building this bridge between the spiritual and the social for teens will be a catalyst for how they see Christ, church, and culture. This will lead to a great spiritual change in church and social change in the community thus

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<sup>15</sup> Hendricks, *The Politics of Jesus*, 31.

allowing teens to build authentic faith and live out the pure practice of Jesus in the gospels. It is evident through the research that there is a need for this type of effective change in the community in which we live; and this issue can be successfully addressed through the life and work of teens who are spiritually connected and socially conscious.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS**

One would assume from the common theme in the text that God is concerned a great deal with just behavior and treatment by God's people specifically, but by all people in general. The theme of justice seems to not only be one that covers the biblical text, but also the way that God operates in the world. The researcher remembers growing up in a church culture that never really dealt with the theme of justice from God's perspective.

The researcher's context had great hymns and devotional prayers, but no talk of justice. The context also had amazing choir songs, pulpit prayers, and hymns of consecration before the sermon, but no talk of justice. Messengers even gave good messages from God's word but never discussed the theme of justice is what God demands. The researcher thought like a child, and eventually, a teen in the church that "church" things were sacred and "justice" things were secular. Furthermore, he felt that the two never would meet. Even stranger is that one of his favorite icons as a child was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. However, even then, he never connected King's campaigns for justice and freedom to his position as a Christian Pastor. Perhaps this was because the researcher's conditioning had taught him not to think that way. So, he read books and memorized speeches of a man who in the 1950s and 1960s led the Montgomery Bus Boycott, lunch counter sit-ins, marches, and rallies in the name of justice, but to the

researcher that is who King was, but still no connection existed for the researcher. Justice is defined in the dictionary as just behavior or treatment.<sup>1</sup> This idea of justice is one that threads itself throughout the entirety of the Christian texts—both Old and New Testaments.

One of the speeches that the researcher memorized as a child was Dr. King's famed "I Have a Dream" speech that he gave on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial with the signer of the Emancipation Proclamation sitting in stone in the backdrop. The Emancipation Proclamation is the document that freed the slaves who were in the Union states. It was no accident that this location had been chosen for this moment. The speaker was also no accident. Dr. King was a third-generation Baptist preacher whose consciousness had always been awakened by the strong social actions of his lineage. Dr. King possessed a Ph.D. and was a master orator with a Baptist style that waxed poetically with words that excited and encouraged all that listened. Not only were the choices of location and speaker very intentional, but the words that Dr. King chose to use were also tactical. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. used many different phrases and quotes that day like "America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked 'insufficient funds.'" <sup>2</sup> This spoke to the fact that the discrimination of blacks in America still existed thus America was not living up to her philosophies evident in her founding documents. Another phrase was "We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of Now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to make real the

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<sup>1</sup> Dictionary.com, s.v. "justice," accessed April 1, 2018, <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/justice>.

<sup>2</sup> Martin L. King Jr., "I Have a Dream" (speech, Washington, DC, August 28, 1963).

promises of democracy.”<sup>3</sup> This, of course, was a reminder to the American people that the time to act on the ideals of its Constitution and Declaration of Independence was now. The quote from that day that stands out most to the researcher is somewhere around the middle of his speech where he so effortlessly quoted Amos 5:24 by saying that “No, no we are not satisfied and will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream.”<sup>4</sup> This was to say that the Negro in America was not to be ignored or pushed away; rather they would continue the fight of equality until justice was achieved.

Interestingly, one of the greatest moments of freedom and justice this world has ever known included the words of a Baptist preacher, out of the word of God, from the lips of one who is called a minor prophet. The Negro in America at that time was, by all means, a second-class citizen. Whether affirmed through the experiences of a Negro man being called “boy” no matter his age or the wisdom he possessed, or perhaps it was the fact that the Negro could not eat, drink, or sit at the same counters and bathrooms as whites. Perhaps it could have been the fact that blacks were not given the right to participate in the democratic voting process in this country, or maybe because they worked just as hard as whites but received less pay. All of these are very true and valid reasons why blacks were treated as less than others in this country. This was a major problem for the Negro and for the entire country. So, God uses the words of a minor prophet to speak to a major issue.

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<sup>3</sup> King Jr., “I Have a Dream.”

<sup>4</sup> King Jr., “I Have a Dream.”

This is not surprising because God is often guilty of using things that persons consider minor to tackle major issues. This idea is a constant theme throughout the Bible. Abraham, Rahab, David, Micah, Peter, Andrew, Saul, and Amos were all pretty insignificant people especially in comparison to the major meanings of their calls. This is also true in the history of the people during the Civil Rights Movement including people like Emmett Till, Rosa Parks, Vernon Johns, Thurgood Marshall, Mahalia Jackson, and Martin Luther King, Jr. All these individuals are minor in terms of lineage, background, education, or socio-economic status, but each of them did something major for the cause of the Negro in this country through their connection with a God who specializes. God took a minor man with words from a minor prophet and put him on a major stage to bring about the most significant change this country has known.

It seems that this is a perfect example of the power of individuals using their spirituality to bring about social reform. Now the researcher understands what he failed to understand as a child—that spirituality and social responsibility are not two opposing thoughts, ideas, or goals; rather they are two sides of the same coin. One cannot exist absent of the other. That is the purpose of this project: “Training Spiritually Connected and Socially Conscious Students (11-19) to Positively Impact Their Communities” with the message of Jesus. This chapter will examine how this can be done from the words and examples of the minor prophet Amos as seen in his prophetic ministry that is found in his Old Testament book by the same name. Specifically, this chapter focuses on Amos 5:21-24, and then, briefly, in closing, this chapter will look at the empathetic evangelizing ministry of Jesus as seen in his announcement of His purpose for coming to earth in Luke 4:18.

I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (Amos 5:24).

Amos was a prophet whose ministry was prominent during the eighth century in the Judaic tradition.<sup>5</sup> A prophet is different from a priest mainly because of their audience. A priest talks to God on behalf of people while the prophet speaks to people on behalf of God. Since God called Amos to be a prophet, his primary responsibility was to speak the word of God to the people to which God sent to him. Although Amos is a prophet, he makes it very clear that his calling had nothing to do with him being trained or qualified for the position. He does this by saying in chapter seven and the fourteenth verse of his book “Amos answered Amaziah, ‘I was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet.’”<sup>6</sup>

There are references in the Old Testament that talk about the school of the prophets. These were prophetic places where the prophets could go and craft their prophetic gifts. They had the gift of prophecy but needed to work on it. This is seen in 1 Samuel 19:18-20 where it reads:

Now David fled and escaped; he came to Samuel at Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him. He and Samuel went and settled at Naioth. Saul was told, “David is at Naioth in Ramah.” Then Saul sent messengers to take David. When they saw the company of the prophets in frenzy, with Samuel standing in charge of them, the spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul, and they also fell into a prophetic frenzy.

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<sup>5</sup> David Allan Hubbard, *Joel and Amos*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 25 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 92.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Coogan, *A Brief Introduction to the Old Testament* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009), 257.



It seems clear from this text that there was obviously a school where the prophets gathered and received instruction under the leadership of the lead prophet who was Samuel at the time. This is also seen in 2 Kings 4:38 where it reads “When Elisha returned to Gilgal, there was a famine in the land. As the company of prophets was sitting before him, he said to his servant, ‘Put the large pot on, and make some stew for the company of prophets.’” Again, this text shows a meeting where both the prophet and the prophet’s sons are present together. When the term “son” is used, it not referring to the blood lineage of these men, rather it refers to the fact that they are prophetic students. In common language, these were the prophets “sons in ministry.” So, it is extremely important when Amos says that he is not a prophet or the son of a prophet because it shows that he is not a professional prophet. This brings contextual depth to Amos’s message.

Does the question then become if Amos is not a professional prophet then what is his profession? Amos answers that question in the “b” clause of Amos 7:14-15 when he proclaims “but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel’” (Amos 7:14-15). Here, Amos again shows that he had another occupation when he was called by God. This is a powerful way to present this message because it shows that Amos was not seeking or applying for the office of prophetic leader, but God initiated this call for his life of prophecy. Amos was keeping sheep and minding his business, not getting in position for higher office or some prophetic calling when he received God’s calling to give God’s message to Israel. Amos is a part of a long line of people in the history of Israel who God called to give leadership, guidance, or speak on behalf of God

without going through formal leadership, receiving prophetic training, or being a part of some priestly lineage.

Amos not being a professional prophet says that he is a herder and a dresser of sycamore trees. This idea of being a dresser of sycamore trees is quite interesting for several reasons that parallel the prophetic calling of Amos. First, *The Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Bible* explains that "the biblical sycamore tree, related to the fig tree, has smaller and less useful fruit than a true fig."<sup>7</sup> This is important because the tree that Amos is accustomed to dressing is not the popular more familiar tree that produces figs; rather it is this smaller less useful fruit tree. The sycamore tree did not stand out among other trees as Saul did among the Israelites, neither did it stand out as being the strongest tree as Sampson was the strongest man during his life as a judge (1 Sam. 1:9). This tree is not picked first for the kickball game nor is this part of the academic achiever's society. This tree is not the fig tree; rather it is the smaller, less useful tree. This is interesting because it seems this describes the earlier comments about Amos not coming from the school of the prophets.

By all accounts, it seems that Amos is not the more significant important of trees like Elijah or Elisha. He is not versed in prophetic ministry like Samuel as he is only a herder and dresser of the sycamore tree. He is smaller and less useful it would seem. There is some commonality between the prophet and the previous positions. Next, not only is the sycamore tree not as recognized or important as the fig, but Amos' work is also a tedious task that may not be exciting or entertaining; but it is essential for the survival of the tree. If not for the dresser, it is possible that the tree would be invaded by

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<sup>7</sup> Christopher Heffron, "Ask a Franciscan: 'Dresser of Sycamores'?" *Franciscan Media*, accessed April 19, 2018, <https://www.franciscanmedia.org/ask-a-franciscan-dresser-of-sycamores/>.

insects and die, which makes the dresser's job of top priority. "The footnote for this verse in The New Jerusalem Bible explains, 'Dressing sycamore-figs involved pinching thin stalks, which helped them to ripen.'"<sup>8</sup> As stated, the dresser would have to pinch the stalks in order to help them ripen. This is indicative of Amos's call to prophetic ministry. He was a dresser in sorts to the Nation of Israel as one who has a tough job that must be completed regardless of how tedious the assignment. Amos's ability to pinch at the things that are keeping the Nation from growing as well as those that threaten the very survival of Israel is what makes his message so relevant and powerful. This is interesting how God can take a person's secular activities and parallel them to their spiritual assignment.

Amos, not a prophet or the son of a prophet but a herder and a sycamore tree dresser, comes from this small town named Tekoa and somehow becomes a prophet who would be the first to have an Old Testament book named after him.<sup>9</sup> God shows in the life of Amos as God does in the journey of so many other biblical personalities that God is able to do so much with so little. Tekoa is a town about twelve miles south of Jerusalem.<sup>10</sup> Jerusalem is the Holy place of God according to Jewish culture. Again, notice the difference between the prophet's birthplace and Jerusalem. Jerusalem with its grand reputation as the "Holy Land" is quite large in comparison to this small obscure place of this prophet. However, the theme of Amos' journey is how God is able to take small insignificant people from unimportant irrelevant places and do grand things with

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<sup>8</sup> Heffron, "Ask a Franciscan" accessed April 19, 2018, <https://www.franciscanmedia.org/ask-a-franciscan-dresser-of-sycamores/>.

<sup>9</sup> Isidore Singer, *The Jewish Encyclopedia: 1906 Edition* (New York, NY: Amazon, 2016), 6, Kindle.

<sup>10</sup> Isidore Singer, ed., s.v. "Tekoa," *The 1901 Jewish Encyclopedia*, StudyLight.org, accessed July 3, 2018, <https://www.studylight.org/encyclopedias/tje/t/tekoa.html>.

them. One can find Tekoa, whose name means trumpet that is confirmed, in the “wild country” just west of the Dead Sea.<sup>11</sup> This is not the first time that one hears of Tekoa in the text. In 2 Samuel 14:2-17, there is a wise woman who deceives David concerning his desire to kill his son, Absalom. This passage states that “Joab sent to Tekoa and brought from there a wise woman. He said to her, ‘Pretend to be a mourner; put on mourning garments, do not anoint yourself with oil, but behave like a woman who has been mourning many days for the dead. Go to the king and speak to him as follows.’ And Joab put the words into her mouth” (2 Sam. 14:2-3).

This is worth mentioning because it is this woman who helps bring peace and reconciliation between David and Absalom after the cold-blooded death of his brother Amnon. Here it is this unknown woman from this small obscure town who is used to mend the hearts of some of Israel’s most beloved figures. In a very similar fashion, God uses this sycamore tree dresser from this same small insignificant town of Tekoa to speak truth to the hearts of some of Israel’s most powerful men. It would be a message that if heard could, as in the case of David and Absalom, help to bring peace for the nation primarily by kindling the anger of God towards Israel.

God uses this herder and dresser of the sycamore tree from this small town of Tekoa as his mouthpiece to be a prophet to the nation. God does not say a lot through him; but what is said is transformative and powerful. As a result of God not saying much, Amos is considered by definition to be a Minor Prophet; this speaks to the length of his writing only and not the depth. Although Minor Prophets had a great deal of importance in their writing and prophecies, they did not write as many words as the prophets who are

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<sup>11</sup> Alexander Maclaren, “The Carcass and the Eagles,” Bible Hub, accessed April 20, 2018, [http://biblehub.com/library/maclaren/expositions\\_of\\_holy\\_scripture\\_a/the\\_carcass\\_and\\_the\\_eagles.htm](http://biblehub.com/library/maclaren/expositions_of_holy_scripture_a/the_carcass_and_the_eagles.htm).

considered to be Major Prophets. Amos is a part of a list of other prophets who are also considered minor such as Hosea, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. As stated, before and what can be clearly seen through this list, these prophets who are considered Minor because of the length of their writings had major things to say. Where would Israel be as a nation if not for the paralleled analogy of the Minor Prophet Hosea who married a prostitute to show how the Nation of Israel had committed great adulterous sins against their faithful and loving God? Consider how the Nation of Israel would have strayed away from justice and love for God and neighbor if they did not have similar words to Amos from Micah in chapter six and verse eight where he writes from God "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

Contemplate the contribution made by Malachi to help shape and reinforce the mindset of the people of Israel towards God with their gifts of tithe and offerings in chapter three. There is an obvious pattern that is developing among these Minor Prophets and the major message that they give to God's people. It is no difference when it comes to the Minor Prophet Amos who was formally a herder and dresser of the sycamore tree from the small inconsequential village of Tekoa whose words, although not many, were extremely meaningful at that point in the history of Israel.

At the time of Amos prophetic ministry, the Kingdom of Israel was no longer united as it had been under previous kings like David and Solomon. It was now divided into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Although Amos was from the southern kingdom, he did his prophetic ministry in the northern kingdom

while Jeroboam II was the king. It was actually a time of great prosperity for Israel.

“Moab, Gilead, and part of Syria were reconquered, and the usual effects of conquest, increased luxury and vainglory, followed.”<sup>12</sup> This corrupt community that is enjoying a season of plenty is where God sends Amos to give prophesy. It is often difficult to give a message of prophecy to a people during a time of prosperity because things are going well which would often lead to the people believing that they are in God’s favor. People when enjoying the luxury of lavishness and the prosperity of plenty struggle to believe that they can be in those moments and not be in the will or plan of God.

This is the predicament that this former herder and dresser of the sycamore tree, from this small insignificant town south of Jerusalem, named Tekoa, is in when he is sent from Judah to Israel. How the poor and disenfranchised are being treated in Israel at this time vexes him. Although the Nation experiences incredible material wealth and prosperity perhaps more so than any other point in its history, they decline morally. So, Amos comes on the scene with his prophecy of God’s impending judgment against Israel. He starts off by speaking out about the judgment of Israel’s neighbors; in the first chapter and the beginning of the second when he speaks out about Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammonites, and Moab.

In these verses, Amos says that for the transgressions that these nations have committed against others, God will not withdraw God’s wrath from them. This is interesting when considering what one now knows about the assignment on which God sent Amos. God punishes these nations due to their unfair, unjust, or brutal treatment of other nations. As a result of the social injustice that they show, this God of justice speaks

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<sup>12</sup> Maclaren, “The Carcass and the Eagles,” accessed April 20, 2018, [http://biblehub.com/library/maclaren/expositions\\_of\\_holy\\_scripture\\_a/the\\_carcass\\_and\\_the\\_eagles.htm](http://biblehub.com/library/maclaren/expositions_of_holy_scripture_a/the_carcass_and_the_eagles.htm).

through this prophet to speak impending judgment against nations who have not practiced judgment. Amos prophecy moves on in chapter two where it transitions from the judgment of neighboring nations and moves towards God's judgment of Judah.

Amos starts his prophecy of judgment to Judah in the same manner that he had with the other nations, "Thus says the Lord: For three transgressions of Judah, and for four," and this poetic literary language is used to show through repetition the magnitude of God's message (Amos 2:4). He goes on to say, that this judgment will happen because they have rejected God's law and have not kept God's commands. Instead, they have been led away by lies that led their forefathers away from God. The law of God for Israel was a set of holy and righteous standards that would keep Israel in just standing with God while making them a model community for the world. When Israel chooses not to keep this law or reject the way of the Lord that demands them to practice wisdom and justice, it indicates that it ultimately rejected God by turning from God's ways. It seems God is saying this has been done because they followed after the lies or idols of their ancestors who also violated on numerous occasions the law of God. For this, God vows to send down God's wrath in the form of fire on the southern kingdom and eventually Jerusalem. This prophecy is fulfilled when years later, King Nebuchadnezzar would come in and do this very thing by burning down the city of Judah and later Jerusalem.

Next, Amos words are turned towards the northern kingdom of Israel. He begins with the same poetic verbiage as each time before and then goes right into the heart of their transgression which is a lack of justice. Notice the language given to this northern kingdom is not about breaking God's commands or being led astray by lies but it goes straight into the fact that Israel has unfair and unjust treatment of people. The lack of

justice seems to be an unpardonable offense from God's perspective. The Hebrew law did declare that the poor could sell themselves; but they must be treated as hired servants and not slaves. It says "If any who are dependent on you become so impoverished that they sell themselves to you, you shall not make them serve as slaves. They shall remain with you as hired or bound laborers. They shall serve with you until the year of the Jubilee" (Levi. 25:39-40).

It seems in this text that Israel has a perversion of just practice. They have taken the law of God given in the Levitical Standards and distorted it to the point where they take good people who are poor and use them merely to make money. The poor for them are only seen as a way to gain more materialism. It goes on to say that it is so bad until they will sell the "needy for a pair of sandals." This is a complete lack of justice and oppression of the poor. This practice is a paralleled reminder of American greed during the slave trade of Africans. America, who was supposed to have strong convictions about God who clearly values justice and the fair treatment of everyone, distorted God's view of justice so that it viewed people as a means of obtaining more material. This is not God's way. Amos goes on to say that they are just mashing the heads of the poor into the ground and pushing out of the way those who are afflicted and in trouble. This is a society where the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. In an effort to keep their standing and status in society, it is possible that the rich created customs and perhaps even rules to ensure they will continue to enjoy wealth and prosperity while the poor people struggle to survive. This is not God's way. Amos continues by speaking to the moral decay of this nation by saying that even fathers and sons are now laying with the same people and the clothing that they lay out when they go to the altar has been



taken from the disenfranchised. Even more so, the wine that they drink in God's house has been purchased with the money that has been obtained unjustly. This is not God's way. It is clear that Israel, although materially prosperous, is morally bankrupt.

In chapter three, Amos pronounces the punishment of God on the house of Israel. As a result of Israel's injustice towards the poor and afflicted, God is saying that God will allow his wrath to be poured out on them in the form of their adversary coming in, surrounding them, and stripping them of their defenses. The analogy God gives is of a shepherd who pulls his lamb out of the mouth of a lion and only recovers a leg or ear. God is saying this to show Israel after they forgo God's judgment, they will recover very little of what they had. God says that God will destroy their fancy homes and luxury buildings. All this judgment is coming because justice is not being done in this nation and God requires justice to be done by God's people. They are losing everything because they are mistreating the poor and afflicted. This shows the seriousness of God as it relates to the theme of justice.

Chapter four is more prophecy from God; but this time God reminds them of the opportunities they have had to turn back to God in times past. Notice here that God is giving example after example of how God is giving to Israel a way back. In the past, God has used a lack of bread, withholding of rain, pestilence, blight, and mildew, and even rescue to bring the people of Israel back to God and yet they still find a way to wander from the place and plan of God.

Amos, the prophet, starts chapter five lamenting because of the word of God that he has to deliver to this Nation of Israel. Israel has strayed so far from justice and fair treatment of people until God is fed up and is ready to pronounce great judgment against

these people. Israel has done a poor job of having just behavior and treatment as God has established in God's law. Therefore, Amos repeatedly says in this chapter things like "Ah, you that turn justice to wormwood, and bring righteousness to the ground" (Amos 5:7)! He also wrote "Therefore because you trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain...you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and push aside the needy in the gate" (Amos 5:11-12).

This is to show how Israel has not practiced any justice or righteousness. Instead, according to this text, they have turned "justice to wormwood." This word is translated to Hemlock or by Eugene Peterson in the Message Version of the Bible as "vinegar" (Amos 5:7). This is to say that Israel has taken something that should be sweet and turned it into something very bitter. Justice when actually practiced in society is indeed sweet. The poor, disenfranchised, needy, and less fortunate are lifted up and helped in society rather than pushed down and hurt. When sweet justice happens, the incredible distance between the rich and poor does not exist. When justice is not bitter, wealth is not made or maintained on the backs of those less fortunate. Israel was supposed to be a model community for the world, so God expected them to lead the way in modeling justice and make that justice sweet.

As a result of the lack of justice and the right doing of Israel, God gives a list of forfeited things that will happen as Amos reads:

You have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not live in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine... Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of hosts, the Lord: In all the squares there shall be wailing; and in all the streets they shall say, "Alas! alas!" They shall call the farmers to mourning, and those skilled in lamentation, to wailing; in all the vineyards there shall be wailing, for I will pass through the midst of you, says the Lord (Amos 5:11, 16-17).

God says that because the people of Israel have committed injustice, they will never live in the houses that they have built nor will they be able to drink the wine that was produced from the vineyards that they planted. God goes on to say, through Amos that God's judgment will lead farmers to sadness, the skilled workers to weeping and those who own the vineyards will moan. All of this is because the Nation of Israel refused to do what was right for the poor and needy. Now, those who have mistreated these groups of vulnerable people will themselves become vulnerable.

God gave the law of God to protect the less fortunate and innocent, yet the people distorted it. As a result, the very thing that God meant to protect people and meant for judges and officials to uphold is now the thing that hurts them the most. Next, God asks the Nation, why they want to see God's judgment? God then goes on to say, God's judgment is dark and gloomy and there is no light when it reads "Alas for you who desire the day of the Lord! Why do you want the day of the Lord? It is darkness, not light; as if someone fled from a lion and was met by a bear; or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall, and was bitten by a snake. Is not the day of the Lord darkness, not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?" (Amos 5:18-20).

The conclusion of chapter five, God is putting into perspective what is primary to God and what is secondary. God, in essence, says that, although they worship and offer sacrifices, none of that matters if they fail to practice justice. Justice for God is primarily above all else. God tries to show Israel that although all of the formalities of worship and devotion to God can be there, if justice is not prevailing, then everything else is in vain. Notice how God chooses to address Israel when it comes to their religious rituals when God says "I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps” (Amos 5:21-23).

What once was sacred and serious to God became something that God actually despises. God says that God takes no pleasure in festivals, assemblies, burnt offerings, grain offerings, or animal sacrifices. God continues to say that He does not listen to the songs that they lift up before Him in worship because justice is not on their agendas. This verse and the following verses are significant because they paint a real picture of God’s disgust with the Nation. In the first major section of this passage, which is perhaps these aforementioned verses, the *Anchor Bible* tells us that “the first portion (vv. 21-24) is an angry denunciation (vv. 21-22) followed by an earnest plea for repentance in both its negative aspect (“stop what you are doing,” v. 23a) and its constructive side (“achieve justice,” v. 24).”<sup>13</sup>

Here, God is clearly upset about what is happening with God’s people and the Nation as a whole, so God denounces their current practices, festivals, and rituals by saying, as stated by the *Anchor Bible*, “stop what you are doing.”<sup>14</sup> As one will see, what they are doing is what they have always done and that is participating in the festivals and gathering, offer sacrifices, gifts, offerings unto the Lord. In essence, Israel has simply continued in the traditions upon which God once smiled. However, God is now saying to stop it, not because God does not want it or require it, but because God is fed up because

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<sup>13</sup> Jacob Neusner, Jacob Milgrom, and Moeshe Weinfeld, *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 523.

<sup>14</sup> Neusner, Milgrom, and Weinfeld, *The Anchor Bible*, 529.

they fail to practice justice. This is the second part of what the *Anchor Bible* says. Not only is God denouncing what they are doing, but now God is telling them what they should do to achieve justice. Justice has always been the theme of the day when it comes to what God expects of God's people. Therefore, when people fail to practice justice, it casts a dark cloud over the meaningless rituals that they do practice.

The Divine starts off by saying that "I Hate" what you do." These are strong words used by a God of love. This idea of hate goes against what Christians believe to be the very nature of God. However, clearly, Israel's lack of justice goes against God's nature as well. Shalom M. Paul, in his commentary on the book of Amos, says "with forceful, unequivocal vehemence, the Deity addresses his next impassioned attack against the cult by commencing with two verbs juxtaposed asyndetically in a first-person address: 'I hate (אָהַבְתִּי), I despise (אָבַדְתִּי) your festivals.'"<sup>15</sup> If God's hate was not enough, God follows up with the word "despise" as well. The verbs joined together would suggest the severe displeasure of God. This is not the only time that God uses this strong language. God uses this same sturdy verbiage in Deuteronomy 16:22 where God says, "nor shall you set up a stone pillar—things that the Lord your God hates" (Deut. 16:22). Also, in Isaiah 1:14 God says, "Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them" (Is. 1:14).

In the first scripture, God just finished talking about injustice in a preceding verse (v. 20) and then transitions to the worship of idols. God says that God hates the worship of idols. This word hate is the same one used in Isaiah concerning festivals but in a subsequent version, (v. 17) it transitions in like fashion to the theme of justice. In each

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<sup>15</sup> Shalom M. Paul and Frank Moore Cross, *Amos: A Commentary on the Book of Amos* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 189.

context listed where God is going against God's loving nature to highlight that God hates a thing, it concerns the theme of justice. This helps one to understand the significance of just treatment according to God. If one pushes a bit further in an attempt to contemporize this concept of God's hatred, one could look at what a translator's handbook on the book of Amos says. It says that, "The translation should be something which means dislike of what people do. There may even be a lively expression like 'feel the shudder of repugnance (which runs down one's spine) at something disgusting.' Or, to use an English idiom which may not be translatable either: 'Your feasts make me sick!'"<sup>16</sup> This gives extreme clarity in laymen's terms on what God means when God says "hate." God is in a real sense saying, "I am repulsed," or "your feast makes me want to vomit." This actually suggests that when God's people do not practice justice, that it completely upsets God's stomach to the point where God wants to vomit.

God is clear about God's level of displeasure with the Nation by saying "hate," but what is it that God hates in this text? God says that it is their festivals that God hates. This is interesting because it is God who was first to command the Nation to observe these festivals. Leviticus the twenty-third chapter tells of the seven festivals that God appointment to the Nation by way of Moses. The seven festivals include The Passover which is a celebration of the blood of a lamb being sprinkled on the doorpost of Jewish homes which caused the Spirit of the Lord to pass over their homes during the last plague on Egypt, which was death (Ex. 12). Next is the feast of unleavened bread which was a time when the Israelites ate no bread with yeast. This was in remembrance of their haste in preparing for their exodus from Egypt. Next is The Feast of Firstfruits. This is a time

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<sup>16</sup> Jan de Waard and William A. Smalley, *A Translator's Handbook on the Book of Amos* (Stuttgart, DE: United Bible Societies, 1979), 119.

when the Israelites would bring the first fruits of their grain harvest so that the priest could present it before the Lord. Next is The Feast of Weeks which occurred fifty days after the Firstfruits and it was a time of thanksgiving to God for their harvest. Next is The Feast of Trumpets which was to commemorate the end of the agriculture season and prepare for the Day of Atonement. Next was The Day of Atonement which celebrated the priest offering sacrifices for the sin of Israel and God turning back to them. Finally, was The Feast of Booths which was a seven-day celebration where the nation would extend offerings unto The Lord. It was necessary to highlight all of the festivals to show their significance to the Israelites but more so to God. It is God who commanded them to celebrate at these times and for God to now say “I hate all of it” is quite significant. It is almost as if God says that all of those festivals, holy convocations, and holy days do not mean anything if the practitioners fail to live out justice.

God goes on to say, “I despise your solemn assemblies.” This idea of despising has to do with smell. Again, Shalom M. Paul shines a light on this idea when he says, “I take no delight (וְלֹא אֲרִיחַ) in your solemn assemblies (בְּעֲצֻרֹתֵיכֶם). The Heb. לִקְרִית בָּ, a term originally applied to the ‘smelling,’ that is, ‘receiving favorably,’ of sacrifices.”<sup>17</sup> God has a long history of using the anthropomorphic illustration of God’s being able to smell and depending on the purity of what is being presented to God, God either accepts it as being a sweet smell or rejects it by saying that it stinks. For example, in Genesis 8:21 says, “And when the Lord smelled the pleasing odor, the Lord said in his heart, ‘I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human

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<sup>17</sup> Paul and Cross, *Amos*, 189.

heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.”

As one can see, clear instances exist where God is pleased and saying that the worship and offerings were a pleasing odor. However, when it comes to this text, God says that their sacrifices and offerings have a stench to the point until God despises it. God continues in God's displeasure by letting the Nation know as a notice that God would not accept the sacrifices by saying that, “Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon” (Amos 5:22).

As stated earlier, the grain offerings, burnt offerings, and the sacrifice of the fatted calf was all a part of Jewish traditional culture. All of the festivals and assemblies included these activities and God puts them on notice that God will not accept the offerings because of their lack of justice. God in this instance rejects the pleas of God's people because God's people reject the pleas of the poor. In essence, God says if you will not hear the cries of the needy then I will not hear you. If you cannot meet their needs, neither will I meet yours. James Cone, in his work *God of the Oppressed*, argues that the issue with Israel in this text as well as throughout the predominance of the Old Testament is that they are in trouble with God because they violated God's first commandment. He wrote:

What was Israel's sin that aroused the anger of God? The prophets were almost unanimous in their contention that Israel disobeyed the first commandment. The people failed to recognize Yahweh's sovereignty in history and thus began to trust their own power and the power of political alliances with other nations (Isa.31:1). But that was not all! The disobedience of the first commandment always has consequences in the social life of the community. Israel, therefore, began to oppress the weak and the poor in its own community.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 61.



Israel failed to honor God, and in response to their lack of honor for God, they ceased to do God's business by being a model community in the world and doing justice. Not doing justice grieves God to the extent that God cannot overlook it, and instead needs to punish Israel for their wrongdoing. Cone continues:

That was why Amos said, "The Lord has sworn by his holiness that your time is coming," because you "grind the destitute and plunder the humble" (4:2; 8:4NEB). Even though Yahweh "cared for you in the wilderness, in a land of burning heat, as if you were in a pasture," you "forgot [him]," becoming "an oppressor trampling on justice, doggedly pursuing what is worthless" (Hos. 13:5-6; 5:11NEB). Because Yahweh will not permit the triumph of evil, Israelites must be punished for their wrongdoings.<sup>19</sup>

The time that was coming for the violation of justice quickly approached and God would not let them off of the hook because of a severe lack of justice. God, again, anthropomorphically expresses God's disgust for them by saying that God will close God's ears and not hear the music of their festivals (v. 23). Earlier, God suggests that God does not want to smell their offerings and now God does not want to hear anything from them. God even goes as far as to say, "I will not listen to the melody of your harps." God is extremely serious about this issue of justice so much so until God says, in essence, that, "not only do I not want to hear your actual voices; I also do not want to hear the music that you play." This is interesting because the instruments and singing always accompanied the festivals, offerings, and worship to God. Again, it seems that God rejects a sign of their fellowship and connection because they rejected the poor. This thought of God not wanting to "hear the noise" of their worship is strong considering that in the past the noise of their worship pleased God.

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<sup>19</sup> Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 61.

Singing and music were used for a plethora of reasons in the Israelite context. For example, it was used during times of liberation like in Exodus 15:20-21, which reads “And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea” (Ex. 15:20-21). After God liberated the Israelites from Egyptians slavery, they sang, played instruments, and danced. They also used it in times of instruction. In Deuteronomy 31:30, Moses in sermonical fashion gives the words of a song to the congregation of Israel to instruct them. There were also times when singing and instruments were used during conquering exploits as seen in Joshua 6:4, when Joshua called trumpets of ram’s horns, to bring down the walls of Jericho. The passage reads “And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams’ horns: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets” (Jos. 6:4). Finally, one sees music in the space of worship as commanded by God. This seems to be ushered in during the reign of David and is described in 2 Chronicles 29:25, where it reads “And he set the Levites in the house of the LORD with cymbals, with psalteries, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, and of Gad the king’s seer, and Nathan the prophet: for [so was] the commandment of the LORD by his prophets” (Chr. 29:25).

In each of these instances, music was very important in communicating love, respect, admiration, loyalty, praise, or appreciation to God. However, none of the music is effective if you are morally bankrupt. Shalom M. Paul suggests that:

This last in the series of the Deity’s rejection of their cult brings the list of verbs to the culminating number of seven (שָׁנְאֵתִי, קִאֲסֵתִי, לֹא אֶרְיֶם, לֹא אֶרְצֶה, לֹא אֶבִּיט, הִסָּר) ,

עֲשֵׂה אֵלֶיךָ) — a heptad of negation representing a complete and comprehensive repudiation... In sum, their cultic ceremonial behavior is found to be as totally repugnant as their secular living habits, which are also accompanied by the very same songs and playing of musical instruments.<sup>20</sup>

Shalom is suggesting that in the biblical writ, seven is the number that represents perfection or completion. In this context, God lets Israel know that God perfectly or completely hates and despise what they are doing as a Nation. Who would have thought that the mistreatment of the poor, the wrongdoing towards the needy, and the mishandling of the afflicted would lead to Israel being completely at odds with God? It is obvious that in God's system of the kingdom, God's list of priorities is vastly different from humanity's priorities. People often include justice wherever it fits, when it seems God is saying to put it at the very top of the list.

God is completely and utterly upset with the Nation for breaking their covenant and not practicing justice. God was fed up and was ready to give judgment. As seen in the *Word Biblical Commentary* on Amos, God forewarned them of the consequences of their covenant breaking "I will lay your cities waste, will make your sanctuaries desolate, and I will not smell your pleasing odors. I will devastate the land so that your enemies who come to settle in it shall be appalled at it."<sup>21</sup> It seems now that God has to make good on the promises that God had made to God's covenant people. This is God's response to a people who have completely turned their back on God and now in what seems to be climatic fashion, God is getting ready to pronounce wrathful judgment on the Nation. *The New Interpreter's Bible* explains it this way, "Now comes a fierce divine

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<sup>20</sup> Paul and Cross, *Amos*, 192.

<sup>21</sup> Douglas K. Stuart, *Word Biblical Commentary: Hosea-Jonah*, ed. Bruce Metzger, David Allen Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker, vol. 31 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014).

rejection of the way the Israelites have been worshipping. God wants no part of their holy days, of their offerings, or even of their hymns of praise. God wants justice and righteousness.”<sup>22</sup> It is almost as if God is craving for something to see or hear or smell and nothing will satisfy that craving but justice. Not songs, offerings, or sacrifices, no, only justice. As a result of God’s desire for justice, it seems that the Nation has an opportunity to correct their wrongs. As stated in *The New Interpreter’s Bible* “There is a general agreement now that the point of these passages is not what is wrong with worship, but what is wrong with the worshippers.”<sup>23</sup>

God obviously would love to have worship but not if the hearts of the worshippers are not in line with God’s way and God’s way is by practicing justice. *The New Interpreter’s Bible* confirms this thought by saying,

The comparable conclusions in the other prophets are statements of the preconditions for acceptable worship. Amos does not intend to replace ritual with social action. Rather, what goes on in society must correspond to what is said and done in worship. Amos tells us the God does not accept the worship of those who show no interest in justice in their daily lives.<sup>24</sup>

God is clear that worship and social justice has to accompany one another. One cannot have merely worship and never practice any justice. God is a God of justice and if worship is towards God, one cannot be true and authentic at that moment if their lives outside of worship do not reflect justice. God is fed up with the Nation and is pronouncing impending judgment because of no justice but before the judgment, God gives an option to the Nation to turn God’s anger from them.

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<sup>22</sup> Leander E. Keck, *The New Interpreter’s Bible: General Articles and Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections for Each Book of the Bible Including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 6 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 394.

<sup>23</sup> Keck, *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, 394.

<sup>24</sup> Keck, *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, 394.

How then should the Nation respond to God's indignation towards them? God is obviously not happy with their lack of justice and moral duty to humanity so what should Israel do? Well, God does not leave humanity hanging; instead, God gives instructions on what humanity should do by saying "But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24). This verse starts off with God saying "but," which is a transitional phrase that contrasts opposing ideas. It is safe to deduce that what God tells them to do in verse twenty-four is in direct contrast to what they did as a Nation and as individuals. In essence, what God tells them to do will directly reverse the results of what they have done. This is verified from *The Anchor Bible* that records, "The faults of 5:7 and 6:12 are to be corrected by responding properly to 5:24."<sup>25</sup> This is evidence that God seems to try to fix the situation by undoing what they did. Amos 5:7 says, "Ah, you that turn justice to wormwood, and bring righteousness to the ground!" Amos goes on to say, "Do horses run on rocks? Does one plow the sea with oxen? But you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood" (Amos 6:12).

Both of these scriptures show how the Nation made a mockery out of justice. Whereas, justice was supposed to be something that is sweet and life-giving, rather it has been turned into something that is bitter and a poison. However, if the nation follows God's prescription, they can be cured of the death and decay of the poison. God says, through this herder and dresser of the sycamore tree from this small town south of Jerusalem named Tekoa, that instead of all of the religious rituals, the sacrifices, songs, and music, Israel should start practicing justice or make justice a priority in addition to all

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<sup>25</sup> Neusner, Milgrom, and Weinfeld, *The Anchor Bible*, 528.

that they did. God says to allow the just and fair treatment of others especially when administered by the rulers to flow down seamlessly, smoothly, and consistently. The term “flowing down” could suggest for them to continue the downward trajectory of justice. As God has been just towards humanity, humanity must from the top down allow that same degree of justice to flow down to the least and left behind of society. This form of justice must flow like waters— one of the most powerful elements on earth. So, it is with God’s justice when it consistently flows. The prophet also mentions “righteousness,” which is the identical and equal treatment of everyone. That means giving each person voting rights, equal educational opportunities, health care, and tax relief. It is not righteousness if it is only reserved for some and not for others. This sort of justice and righteousness should continuously flow like an ever-flowing stream meaning that it does not stop its flow. Regardless of who is in office or what party is the majority at the time, this sort of justice and righteousness continues to flow, insomuch that it will tumble over or drown any force that seeks to stop or oppose its flow. This is God’s way. This is the right way.

It is no accident that God uses these familiar agricultural terms to illustrate how justice should look. It should be like a river from which people are able to come and draw to help meet their needs of the day. Righteousness like an “ever-flowing” stream was best illustrated by de Waard and Smalley as they wrote that:

The “everflowing” stream (RSV) contrasts with one that becomes dry during the dry season, so TEV reads a river that never goes dry. This makes the meaning of the comparison clear and would be helpful in many geographic areas where there may even be different words for seasonal and non-seasonal streams as well as in areas in which a stream is always “everflowing.” It expresses the permanent character of righteousness in a more powerful way.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Waard and Smalley, *A Translator’s Handbook on the Book of Amos*, 121.

It is clear that God expects justice to always be available to all persons and that justice has to smell, look, and sound pure to God. The justice must also never dry up. It has to always be available to meet the needs of the most vulnerable of society who need to draw from its waters. The *Word Biblical Commentary* says, “Justice and righteousness cannot stop and start like a wilderness wadi that flows with water only during the rainy seasons and otherwise is just a dry stream bed. They must instead continue night and day, all year.”<sup>27</sup> The Nation during Amos ministry and many countries today would like to treat justice like a seasonal stream. Humanity flows with life-giving justice during certain times throughout the year and then other times humanity’s justice dries up. God is clear that justice has to be ever-flowing in the sense that it can never stop or cease to flow and give change in its path that is bathed in its powerful current.

In conclusion, the theme of justice being a principle of God is not just an Old Testament idea; but it also permeates throughout the New Testament as well with perhaps the greatest figure from which others can learn and that person is Jesus. Jesus practiced justice as a lifestyle. When Jesus gives his declaration for his earthly pilgrimage, he does so with the major tone and tune of justice. This announcement is found in Luke where it reads, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free” (Lk. 4:18).

Jesus comes to his hometown of Nazareth, goes to the synagogue, gets the scroll, read from Isaiah, and declares that the Spirit of the Lord is on him. As a result of the Spirit of the Lord being upon him, he is energized and empowered to do some things

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<sup>27</sup> Stuart, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 355.

such as give good news to the poor, set wrongfully accused people free, open the eyes of those who are blinded to the social woes of community, and lift those who are oppressed up from under that bondage. All of the results of God's Spirit being upon Jesus led to him not only speaking up for justice but also practicing justice to the poor, disenfranchised, and afflicted. It seems that if Jesus' reaction to God's Spirit is justice then the responses of Christians should be similar.

The theme of justice is just as relevant today as it has ever been. In today's society, there is a clear divide between the haves and the have nots. Each day the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. People that have lifetime health care create laws to take away the health care of the poor. Lawmakers who do not pay taxes impose taxes on others. This nation, much like that of Israel during Amos's time and Nazareth during Jesus's time has forgotten how to practice justice for all. This is the time in history where those who proclaim to follow Jesus must follow him authentically in the same spirit in which he stood up and fought for justice. The transformation of making justice the main priority as a Christian community starts and is maintained just as it was with the Civil Right Movement—with young students and teens. This is why this project is so vital to not only teens and Christians, but for the world if she will be transformed. The project "Training Spiritually Connected and Socially Conscious Students Ages Eleven to Nineteen to Positively Impact Their Communities" seeks to teach and train students to participate in ministry that pleases God. There are fears that the contemporary church is at a rapid rate of producing generations of students and adults alike who have no awareness of social issues and Christian approaches to answer them. This project can



begin to shift the culture and change the climate from the bottom up which will eventually flow from top to bottom.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS**

Religion starts with the idea that something is wrong in the world and needs to be corrected. The basis of religion is that something is wrong, and the tenants and beliefs of a particular religion seek to solve through deity what they perceive is wrong in the world. Buddhist believes suffering is what is wrong with the world and the only way to overcome that suffering is through the detachment of desires which is the root of suffering. Hindus believe ignorance is what is wrong with the world and the only way to get rid of ignorance is with knowledge. Christians believe that sin is what is wrong with the world and the only way to solve sin is through the person of Jesus Christ who has conquered sin. Something is wrong in the world and religion is supposed to solve what is wrong in the world, but what happens when the religion is in collusion with the wrong?

Religion is the tool or mechanisms by which humans first connect with God to better help connect to one another. In a world where there are thousands of religions and even more subgroups within each religion, there still remains the fact that each of those religions, no matter the conflict with one another, primarily have the same goal of making individuals better so that they can make society better. What is interesting, however, is that the differences in religion often draw a wedge between individuals in society thus defeating the ultimate purpose of religion. This idea is seen in a wide spectrum of ways throughout human history from the biblical account of Pharaoh, Moses, and the Hebrews

to Hitler and the Jews in Germany during World War II. Both of these are examples of two groups who were supposed to have some understanding of God and the teachings of their God understanding lead to very different outcomes. This may be somewhat expected when looking at religions that have different gods thus different religious perspectives, but what about when the oppressor and oppressed share the same God and religious traditions?

This was the case with the slavery of African people in both Europe and America. It was perhaps the biggest dichotomy that this world has ever known. Mainly because those who were slave owners and slaves worshipped the same God and practiced the same religion. On one hand, God was affirming for slave owners through their religion and worship experiences that slavery was an acceptable act, while on the other, God was apparently saying to slaves that the institution of slavery was inhumane, unethical, and violated the very law of God. This great divide is evidently seen first, in the resistance of slave owners to baptize slaves fearing they would be emancipated. Albert J. Raboteau in his work *Slave Religion: The Invisible Institution in the Antebellum South USA* says:

Christianity came more slowly to the slaves of North America. Many colonial slaveholders feared that baptizing slaves would lead to emancipation because of vague laws concerning the slave status of Christians under British colonial rule. Even after 1706, by which time many states had passed laws stating that baptism would not alter slave status, slaveholders were worried that the catechization of slaves wouldn't be a wise economic choice. Slaves usually had one day off each week, usually Sunday. That time was used to grow their own crops, as well as dancing and singing (doing such things on the Sabbath was frowned on by most preachers), so there was little time for slaves to receive religious instruction.<sup>1</sup>

It is clear that although “Christian” slaveholders wanted slaves to embrace their religion, that it may produce a problem because it may lead to the liberation or emancipation of

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<sup>1</sup> Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion the Invisible Institution in the Antebellum South* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University, 1980).

slaves. It seems that the slave owners understood the emancipating ability of the gospel message and was reserved about slave receiving that message. In response to this dilemma, some slave masters would give their slaves “Slave Bibles” that had many of the liberating texts deleted like the story of Israel’s emancipation from Egypt or Pharaoh being told by Moses to let God’s people go but other texts like Ephesians 6:5, “Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ.” On the other hand, slave preachers were using the same Bible, religion, and Jesus to preach something radically different. David C. Dennard says in his work *Religion in the Quarters: A Study of Slave Preachers in the Antebellum South, 1800-1860*:

During the antebellum period, slave preachers - enslaved or formally enslaved evangelists became instrumental in shaping slave Christianity. They preached a gospel radically different from that of white preachers, who often used Christianity in an attempt to make slaves more complacent to their enslaved status. Rather than focusing on obedience, slave preachers placed a greater emphasis on the Old Testament, especially the book of Exodus. They likened the plight of the American slaves to the enslaved Hebrews of the Bible, instilling hope into the hearts of those enslaved. Slave preachers were instrumental in shaping the religious landscape of African Americans for decades to come.<sup>2</sup>

The difficult dichotomy is clear to see when the God of the oppressed is the same God of the oppressor. One God standing on completely opposite sides of the ring.

These fore stated acts of religion may be an unfortunate time when instead of religion fixing what is wrong with the world, it is actually in collusion with the wrong. In these moments, it is imperative that individuals stand up and speak truth to power no matter how oppressive the powers may be. It is not likely that the voice that would be heard in these moments will come from the minority, but someone or group from the

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<sup>2</sup> David C. Dennard, *Religion in the Quarters: A Study of Slave Preachers in the Antebellum South, 1800-1860* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University, 1984), 3465.

majority will have to speak out and lead a charge against the injustice that prevails. In an April 2009 article, Susan Morgan who writes a blog for the *Huffington Post* quotes Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as saying “The hottest place in Hell is reserved for those who remain neutral in times of great moral conflict.”<sup>3</sup> It seems that Dr. King confirms the idea that not only must the oppressed yell out for justice but justice must be demanded by those that are in the majority group of the oppressor. In the case of slavery of Africans, this was a time of great moral conflict and someone had to be natural on this great issue of morality. The idea of someone from the dominant culture standing up and speaking up has to happen not only in the case of slavery of Africans but for every injustice and unfair treatment of a group of people anywhere in the world at any time. The group from the dominant majority that did not remain neutral but spoke out against the severe injustices of slavery was the Religious Society of Friends, commonly known as the Quakers or Friends.

The remainder of this chapter will be examining from a historical perspective this Christian movement that fought against the heinous institution that dehumanized people of color for hundreds of years. The movement will closely examine, key figures in the movement, some of the social woes that were addressed by the movement, and finally the movement today. This examination will show from a historical perspective how the preaching of the gospel in its most authentic form addresses not only spiritual issues, but it equally deals with the issues of society. This will in part give validity to the project in showing why it is important to train students and adults alike to affect their communities both spiritually and socially with the message of Jesus.

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<sup>3</sup> Susan Morgan, “The Hottest Place in Hell,” *Huffington Post*, April 12, 2009, accessed June 14, 2019, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/susan-morgan/the-hottest-place-in-hell\\_b\\_174140.html-4/12/2009](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/susan-morgan/the-hottest-place-in-hell_b_174140.html-4/12/2009).

The mid-1600s was a time of turmoil and tension in the Church of England. This church that was historically Catholic but also followed some Protestant ideas and it was experiencing great disorder. As a result of this turmoil, many people were leaving to start competing churches.<sup>4</sup> A primary reason for this was because of the English Civil War that took place from 1642 to 1651 and included nationally internal fights that ultimately affected government but would eventually affect the church as well. During this period, many English Dissenters arose. These were Protestants Christians who separated from the Church of England in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>5</sup> Many of their reasons for leaving involved dissatisfaction with the church and its leadership under the English Parliament.

It was during this time that George Fox started The Religious Society of Friends or Quakers. Almost immediately, this new movement's teaching was at odds with those of mainstream society thus creating opposition and then persecution. Some of the teachings that differed from The Church of England or mainstream society were not affirming women in ministry but the Quakers belief that the light of God was in all people and women could minister as well. Another issue was that the church was silent or complicit in the institution of slavery, but the Quakers felt that all people were created free by God and the enslavement of any person violated the law of God. This sort of opposition and persecution would become the identity of The Religious Society of Friends. The Religious Society of Friends is historically a Christian organization, so them

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<sup>4</sup> "History: George Fox," History, accessed June 14, 2019, [www.history.com/topics/history-of-quakerism](http://www.history.com/topics/history-of-quakerism).

<sup>5</sup> F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 490.

being persecuted or in opposition with mainstream society was not new to the church universal. The Christian experience, in general, was started in this same sort of way.

Jesus's teaching was seemingly in opposition to that of the Sadducees and Pharisees. The Sadducees was a member of a Jewish party of the intertestamental period consisting of a traditional ruling class of priests and rejecting doctrines, not in the Law (such as resurrection, retribution in a future life, and the existence of angels)<sup>6</sup> and the Pharisees were a member of a Jewish sect of the intertestamental period noted for strict observance of rites and ceremonies of the written law and for insistence on the validity of their own oral traditions concerning the law.<sup>7</sup> Both of these groups, one made up of priest and the other of the laity had firm beliefs about Jewish faith and traditions, however, for them, Jesus was seeking to discount or discontinue Jewish custom so there was constant strife opposition from these sects towards Jesus and his ideas. The religious authority was challenged by the thought and teachings of Jesus and they in partnership with the Roman government ultimately caused Jesus the most severe persecution of the day when he was crucified. Opposition and persecution were not only towards the person of Jesus but also against the early established church. According to Acts, persecution began early on against the early church because of what was seen as liberal teachings by this group of followers. In Acts 7:54-58, Stephan is being stoned for his commitment as a follower of Jesus.

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<sup>6</sup> "Sadducee," Merriam Webster, accessed June 14, 2019, [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Sadducee](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Sadducee).

<sup>7</sup> "Sadducee," Merriam Webster, accessed June 14, 2019, [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Sadducee](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Sadducee).

This sort of persecution is also historically documented in sources outside of the Bible. The persecution of the early Christians was harsh under many rulers but perhaps none as brutal as that of Nero. The emperor Nero has a legacy of bringing great persecution upon Christians. John William Charles Wand writes in his book *A History of the Early Church to AD 500*, “In 66 AD there occurred an event which was to change the whole course of its history. In that year no fewer than 3000 Jews were put to death by the persecutor Gessius Florus and the nation was goaded into revolt.”<sup>8</sup> It is believed that during this time, well-known apostles like Peter, Paul, and James were put to death. It is evident through these occurrences both verified through the Bible and historians that the early church as well as the person Jesus Christ experienced great persecution. Therefore, persecution was not new or identical to the religion as a whole, but it would soon become very familiar to George Fox and The Religious Society of Friends or Quakers.

George Fox was born in Leicestershire, about the year 1624. He and his siblings were raised in the way and worship of the nation.<sup>9</sup> It was believed that Fox’s mother was the driving force behind him and his sibling’s strong faith and belief. Although Fox was just a boy, he is said to have always had a seriousness about him that was more mature than others his age. This is mentioned in his journal where he writes “But from a child he appeared of another frame of mind than the rest of his brethren; being more religious, inward, still, solid, and observing, beyond his years, as the answers he would give, and the questions he would put upon occasion, manifested to the astonishment of

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<sup>8</sup> John Wand and Charles Williams, *A History of the Early Church to AD 500* (London, UK: Routledge, 1990), 12.

<sup>9</sup> John L. Nickalls, *The Journal of George Fox* (Boston, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1952).



those that heard him, especially in divine things.”<sup>10</sup> It seemed to be very clear even early on in the life of George Fox that there was something more religiously different about him. Even at the early age of eleven, Fox was all but set aside for the work and purpose of life and ministry. Fox wrote of himself, “When I came to eleven years of age,” he said, “I knew pureness and righteousness; for, while I was a child, I was taught how to walk to be kept pure. The Lord taught me to be faithful, in all things, and to act faithfully two ways; viz., inwardly to God, and outwardly to man.”<sup>11</sup> This idea of pureness would be a theme of not only his life but eventually that of the movement that he would start.

Fox left home early on to try and find some religious relief for the spiritual torment that he experienced in his mind. His journey is again happening at the time of the English Civil War and Fox is attempting to reconcile his spiritual consciousness with the church and government. To help with his spiritual journey, Fox would go and speak with clergymen, English Dissenters in particular. These, of course, were men who were free spiritual thinkers, this was different from those of the established church. However, this did little to satisfy his torment because he still disagreed with many of them as well on ideas of whether women had souls to which he believed they did.<sup>12</sup> This idea of gender inclusiveness would become a huge part of his ministry and movement. Fox traveled a great deal over the next years and spoke to many clergymen but could not gain quenching for his spiritual thirst. Fox says in his own words:

As I had forsaken the priests, so I left the separate preachers also, and those esteemed the most experienced people; for I saw there was none among them all

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<sup>10</sup> George Fox, “A Journal or Historical Account of the Life, Travels, Sufferings, Christian Experiences and Labour of Love in the Work of the Ministry of that Ancient, Eminent and Faithful Servant of Jesus Christ,” *Sabin Americana* (February 23, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Nickalls, *The Journal of George Fox*.

<sup>12</sup> Nickalls, *The Journal of George Fox*.

that could speak to my condition. And when all my hopes in them and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do, then, oh, then, I heard a voice which said, "There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition"; and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy. Then the Lord let me see why there was none upon the earth that could speak to my condition, namely, that I might give Him all the glory; for all are concluded under sin, and shut up in unbelief as I had been, that Jesus Christ might have the pre-eminence who enlightens, and gives grace, and faith, and power. Thus when God doth work, who shall let (*i.e. prevent*) it? And this I knew experimentally.<sup>13</sup>

With Fox realizing that his spiritual condition could only be spoken to by Jesus, he began his public preaching ministry in 1647 and his style of powerful preaching quickly attracted followers.<sup>14</sup> It is hard to tell when this religion started or if Fox even intended for it to be a religious sect, but it began a steady following of travelers. Early on, The Religious Society of Friends were called "Children of the Light" because they believed that the light of God shined in every person and not only reserved for certain persons within the church. This sort of varying from the social and religious norm would become the theme of this religion. This challenge of social and religious norms, which all but one and the same at the time was met with a great deal of opposition and Fox was imprisoned at time for his refusal to give in to the pressures to conform culturally. A judge mocked Fox's exhortation to "tremble at the word of the Lord," calling him and his followers "Quakers" which would become a commonly used name for the religious movement.<sup>15</sup> Fox would be imprisoned several times for his preaching and defiance to conformity. Fox was preaching to more and more people and on some occasion thousands of people. It seems that the Quakers had become a solid religious sect.

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<sup>13</sup> Religious Society of Friends, *Quaker Faith and Practice* §19.02 (Pennsylvania, PA: Quaker Books, 1995).

<sup>14</sup> Nickalls. *The Journal of George Fox*.

<sup>15</sup> Nickalls, *The Journal of George Fox*.

The Quakers main point of emphasis was their belief that the light of God can be experienced in each person individually. This, of course, was a different thought from the Church of England at the time who believed that this light was primarily seen in the hierarchy figures in its structure. This idea is not specific to Quakers. It is the belief in the priesthood of all believers as seen in 1 Peter 2:9. "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

This again suggests that each believer as an individual has God in them thus making them a priest. In the mid-seventeenth century, the Church of England went through a lot to appoint and ordain priest who shared in the weighty responsibility of sharing the message of God with the world. The priest believed they have been given the light of God; therefore, giving them the ability to walk in this calling. There was obvious offense taken when the Quakers suggested that everyone who believes is a priest by God and not through the authority of The Church of England. The Quakers message quickly gained momentum and before long there were going throughout Great Britain and other continents with their message. There was a group within the Quakers, known as the Valiant Sixty, which was a group of itinerant preachers who traveled with hopes of converting people to their way. The message of the light of God and the priesthood of all believers was already ideas that were counter culture, but during these travels many of the Quaker ministers that would share the gospel of Jesus Christ were women which were just as counter culture as the message that they were preaching because they believed that women had souls and the light of God as well.<sup>16</sup> It is clear that the Quakers had no plans

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<sup>16</sup> Margaret Bacon, *Mothers of Feminism: The Story of Quaker Women in America* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1986), 24.

on conforming in any area of their beliefs. This idea of not conforming would become the trademark of the Quakers as they disagreed and spoke up for equality of women, education, and the abolition of slavery.

Many of the people that traveled with the Quakers would eventually end up in jail for disorderly conduct and their refusal to give an oath which meant that they could not pledge their allegiance to the country. The refusal to swear oaths or take up arms came to be a much more important part of his public statements. Refusal to take oaths meant that Quakers could be prosecuted under laws compelling subjects to pledge allegiance, as well as making testifying in court problematic.<sup>17</sup> These individuals whose names have been permanently etched on the scrolls of Christian persecution experienced oppression and imprisonment for speaking their truth. This is extremely important because this may have been the switch that would ignite their convictions to stand up for others and their truth. In any case, these next individuals were persecuted, jailed, and beaten for their conviction about Jesus Christ and his message. If you are to be a true follower of Jesus in the essence and spirit in which Jesus led, then one must speak truth to the powers that be and stand up for the injustice that exists anywhere even if it makes the powers that be uncomfortable. Obery M. Hendricks Jr. says in his book *The Politics of Jesus: Rediscovering the True Revolutionary Nature of Jesus' Teachings and How They Have Been Corrupted*, "The uncompromising example of Jesus Christ places upon every Christian minister the responsibility to withstand the temptation to align oneself with the secular ruling powers. It is true that it is part of every minister's calling to be a pastor to his or her parishioners, to be a spiritual leader and teacher and a comforter of the sick at

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<sup>17</sup> Nickalls, *The Journal of George Fox*.

heart and those afflicted in mind, soul, spirit, or body. Ministers of the Gospel must comfort the afflicted, but they also have the prophet's duty to afflict the comfortable."<sup>18</sup> These very Quakers refused the temptation to align themselves with the ruling powers; instead, they were moved and motivated by a greater power.

Margaret Fell, later Margaret Fox is suggested to be the Mother of Quakerism based off of the title of a book by that name.<sup>19</sup> Upon meeting George Fox in 1652, she believed that your eyes were opened in a way that they had not been before. She said of that experience that Fox, "opened us a book that we had never read in, nor indeed had never heard that it was our duty to read in it (to wit) the Light of Christ in our consciences, our minds never being turned towards it before."<sup>20</sup> It was not long until Margaret's home Swarthmoor Hall, a mansion in North West England became the headquarters for the Quaker meetings. Eventually, Margaret's husband, Thomas Fell who would become a judge died and she would later marry George Fox. Margaret was a part of the aforementioned Valiant Sixty, which was a group of traveling itinerant preachers who sought to convince and convert many places in England and around the world with the message of the Light of God. Margaret, as a traveling preacher, naturally gained opposition because many not only believed that the office of a preacher was reserved for men, but some even thought that women did not have souls.

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<sup>18</sup> Obery Hendricks, *The Politics of Jesus: Rediscovering the True Revolutionary Nature of Jesus' Teachings and How They Have Been Corrupted* (New York, NY: Double Day Religion, 2006), 33.

<sup>19</sup> Isabel Ross, *Margaret Fell Mother of Quakerism*, 2nd ed. (York, UK: William Sessions Book Trust, 1984).

<sup>20</sup> Catherine Helen Spence, *Spence Manuscripts* (Adelaide, Australia: State Library of South Australia, 2006), 135.

Margaret was imprisoned many times for her refusal to conform to the way of society. Perhaps one of her most famous of prison stays was in 1664 when she was imprisoned for four years for refusing to take an oath and for having the Quaker meetings in her home. This was an interesting time for her in prison. The Apostle Paul had begun to write the prison epistles that justified women and the equality in ministry. It was called “Women’s Speaking Justified,” it would become a major text on women’s religious leadership.<sup>21</sup> Margaret used text such as Joel 2:28, John 6:5, and Jeremiah 31:34 to scripturally strengthen her argument. All of these scriptures suggest that God demonstrates equal opportunity when it comes to who He pours His spirit upon. This again is the catalyst for the belief in the Light of God for every believer and the justification for women having the ability to proclaim the gospel message of Jesus.

Edward Burrough was another famous Quaker who met an untimely death at twenty-nine years of age in prison for speaking out against the powers that be including to King Charles II in which he found some favor.<sup>22</sup> Burrough was educated in the Church of England but quickly converted to Quakerism upon hearing the message of the Light of God preached by George Fox in 1652.<sup>23</sup> He would be considered one of the Valiant Sixty and as an itinerant traveling preacher; he eventually used his platform to get the gospel to “The New World” or America. One of the famous victories of Burrough was

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<sup>21</sup> Margaret Fell, “Women’s Speaking Justified, Proved, and Allowed of by the Scriptures, All such as Speak by the Spirit and Power of the Lord Jesus,” Quaker Heritage Press Online Texts, accessed June 14, 2019, <http://www.qhpress.org/texts/fell.html>.

<sup>22</sup> Edward Burrough and Francis Howgill, *The Memorable Works of a Son of Thunder and Consolation: Namely, that True Prophet, and Faithful Servant of God, and Sufferer for the Testimony of Jesus, Edward Burroughs, Who Dyed a Prisoner for the Word of God, in the City of London, the Fourteenth of the Twelfth Moneth, 1662* (Ann Arbor, MI: Text Creation Partnership, 1671).

<sup>23</sup> Burrough and Howgill, *The Memorable Works of a Son of Thunder and Consolation*.

for him to persuade the King to issue a writ to temporarily stop the corporal and capital punishments of the Quakers in Massachusetts.<sup>24</sup> Again, this is a brave example of these men and women being so moved by their convictions until they were willing to be imprisoned and even die for what they believed. The Quakers allowed their spirituality to drive them socially towards making reform and change in society as is in the example of Jesus of Nazareth.

Mary Fisher was a missionary in the Quaker religion. It is through her efforts that the message of the Priesthood of all believers, the Light of God, equality for women, and other thoughts of Quakerism was brought to the new world or America. Being subsidized by the Quaker Movement, Fisher and another acquaintance travel first to Barbados in the Caribbean, where they were well received; and where they converted the lieutenant governor of the island to Quakerism.<sup>25</sup> After the success in this country, they decided to travel to Boston where they were not greeted warmly rather they were treated with imprisonment and public shaming. Although there would not be much success for Fisher in sharing the gospel of Jesus in America, it would be a catalyst of change by getting the gospel and its social implications to America.

As seen throughout this chapter, the Quakers had made a name for themselves in England by taking the principles that they believed about the gospel and attempt to not only bring about spiritual reformation but also social transformation. They were arrested and imprisoned for speaking out for gender equality, fair treatment of the poor, capital punishment, and government and church misuse. Their arrival in America would not stop

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<sup>24</sup> Burrough and Howgill, *The Memorable Works of a Son of Thunder and Consolation*.

<sup>25</sup> Edward Digby, *Baltzell Puritan Boston and Quaker Philadelphia* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1979), 86.

the momentum of their push for social change. All of the issues mentioned before was still addressed but another issue that was addressed in England because of their practices would take center stage in America; and that was the issue of slavery.

At this point, during the seventeenth century in America, slavery was at its peak and more brutal than ever. American slave owners were going to the coast of Africa and bringing African men and women to America and subjecting them to the harshest forms of human servitude and bondage ever known to the human race. The enslavement of African people was more traumatic on African lives than any of mechanism ever known to any other race. Elikia M'bokolo once wrote this in a left-wing African newspaper called *Le Monde diplomatique*:

The African continent was bled of its human resources via all possible routes. Across the Sahara, through the Red Sea, from the Indian Ocean ports, and across the Atlantic. At least ten centuries of slavery for the benefit of the Muslim countries (from the ninth to the nineteenth)... Four million enslaved people exported via the Red Sea, another four million through the Swahili ports of the Indian Ocean, perhaps as many as nine million along the trans-Saharan caravan route, and eleven to twenty million (depending on the author) across the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>26</sup>

According to M'bokolo millions upon millions of Africans were taken from their native land to be slaves in other countries, not just America; but there were eleven to twenty million brought to America through the Atlantic Ocean. This institution of slavery was a major part of American culture. A vast majority of America including the religious Christian community all but agreed with this horrific institution. No one, even those who were most pious and religious would speak out against slavery except the Quakers.

Fox's views began the social change among the Quakers that would eventually lead to the abolition of slavery. Again, this view was completely contrary to the views of the country even the Christian community. Later on, one of the first

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<sup>26</sup> Elikia M'bokolo, "The Impact of the Slave Trade on Africa," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, April 2, 1998.



Quakers to be converted to this way of thinking was an Irish Quakers named John Woolman. Woolman helped changed the hearts of many.

Preaching and criticism of slavery eventually lead to the Quakers creating communities in Pennsylvania where slavery among Quakers was completely prohibited. The efforts of the Quakers eventually help lead to the denouncement and ultimate abolition of slavery. It is even believed that many of the stops or houses along the famed Underground Railroad, which was an escape route for runaway slaves, was owned by Quakers who believed that every person, by right from God, was free and should not be morally mistreated. This again was a completely different thought from that of society but lead to great results because they used their spiritual conviction to move them towards social change.

It is refreshing to note that the position of The Quakers has not changed in the twenty-first century. The Quakers are still standing up and speaking out against the injustices and oppression of persons brutalized by a system designed to oppress them. One of the major issues that The Quakers address in contemporary society is that of mass incarceration. Michelle Alexander deals with this systematic woe in her book *The New Jim Crow* where she writes:

In the era of colorblindness, it is no longer socially permissible to use race, explicitly, as a justification for discrimination, exclusion, and social contempt. So we don't. Rather than rely on race, we use our criminal justice system to label people of color "criminals" and then engage in all the practices we supposedly left behind. Today it is perfectly legal to discriminate against criminals in nearly all the ways that it was once legal to discriminate against African Americans. Once you're labeled a felon, the old forms of discrimination—employment discrimination, housing discrimination, denial of the right to vote, denial of educational opportunity, denial of food stamps and other public benefits, and exclusion from jury service—are suddenly legal. As a criminal, you have scarcely more rights, and arguably less respect, than a black man living in Alabama at the

height of Jim Crow. We have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it.<sup>27</sup>

The Quakers have taken note of this new form of systematized racism and is active in speaking up and out against its reality and the perpetrators of its gruesome acts. Pamela Haines who writes for The Quakers of Central Philadelphia meeting says in an article entitled “21st Century Quakers, Slavery and Mass Incarceration:”

We have a proud history of opposition to slavery. Many Quakers were active in the fight against segregation. What do we do now? Mass incarceration is a monster with many tentacles. Injustice and racism are embedded in the system every step along the way, as most of us are painfully aware. Policing and arrests concentrate in poor neighborhoods. Pre-trial rules allow the rich and guilty to go free more easily than the poor and innocent. Urban crime is seen as more dangerous than its suburban counterpart, as in the widely different sentences for use of crack and powder cocaine. So black men—as well as other people of color—are incarcerated at rates far higher than those for whites. At the same time, practices within prisons have become increasingly punitive, as seen most starkly in widespread use of solitary confinement. When they leave prison, returning citizens are routinely deprived of many of their rights of citizenship, including the right to vote. With the prison-building boom, brought on by the tough-on-crime stands of Nixon, Reagan, and Clinton, profit-seeking companies swarmed in, eager to make money off of building and running prisons and exploiting low-wage prison labor. We can speak out and work against any or all of these injustices. We can reach to be present to the human beings who are caught in the system, both people in prisons and their families outside. We can attack it at its oldest root, asserting that justice requires a change in the language of the 13th Amendment.<sup>28</sup>

It seems that The Quakers are more focused on allowing the Light of God that lives in them to illuminate the path of life that is often dimmed by the injustices of the world.

In conclusion, it is clear that this moment of Christian dissenters of England that would eventually become The Religious Society of Friends or Quakers were led by

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<sup>27</sup> Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (Jackson, TN: Perseus Distribution, 2010), 2.

<sup>28</sup> Terry Roberts, “Twenty First Century Quakers, Slaves and Mass Incarceration,” accessed June 14, 2019, [www.fgcquaker.org/cloud/central-philadelphia-monthly-meeting/discussions/21st-century-quakers-slavery-and-mass](http://www.fgcquaker.org/cloud/central-philadelphia-monthly-meeting/discussions/21st-century-quakers-slavery-and-mass).

tremendous convictions from Jesus Christ which caused them to forsake all of the social norms and focus solely and completely on the message given to them from God. It is amazing when those that have the convictions of Christ actually use those convictions to not only affect spiritual systems but also to have a great impact on things that are social. What the Quakers did by using the gospel message that they believed in to help encourage social change is now commonly referred to as the social gospel. Christopher Lasch in his article, "Religious Contributions to Social Movements: Walter Rauschenbusch, the Social Gospel, and Its Critics" says:

It can be argued that religion alone supplies the righteous indignation required for an assault on injustice and, more broadly, that it supplies the sense of ethical solidarity, the willingness to sacrifice selfish interests to the common good and to help those in need, in the absence of which social movements either dissolve into a vague humanitarianism or achieve only the higher form of selfishness characteristic of organized interest groups.<sup>29</sup>

This quote describes how religion is perhaps the most powerful means of attacking injustice in any context. The idea that an assault must be taken against injustice is exactly the course that the Quakers and many others have taken when dealing with the injustices that exist. Lasch says that religion provides a sort of righteous indignation that is needed if one is going to be successful in dealing with the many injustices that exist. The revolutionary Jesus had this sort of desire to launch an assault on injustice and he too did it through the means of religion.

Another thing that is mentioned in this text is that one must be willing to sacrifice whatever selfish interest that they may personally have in order to meet the needs of those in need of justice. In the case of the Quakers, it was women, the poor, the falsely

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<sup>29</sup> Christopher Lasch, "Religious Contributions to Social Movements: Walter Rauschenbusch, the Social Gospel, and Its Critics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 7-25.

imprisoned, slaves, and so many other groups of people that needed justice and this group with righteous indignation and driven by their convictions such as equality for all people fought against the injustice that existed.

In an age of the Me Too Movement which deals with gender equality, the Black Lives Matter Movement that deals with race equality, unfair treatment to the poor and disenfranchised, the fighting of equality by the LGTBQ community, and the prison industrial complex, it is important for a response to injustice to take place. That is why the project is critical to the spiritual and social context. Leaders must train youth to impact their communities both spiritually and socially with the message of Jesus. Students must understand that as a part of their Christian witness, that they have a responsibility to stand up and say something. They cannot sit quietly while injustice exists in any corner or area of the world.

Leaders must not only show them the reserved Jesus but also the revolutionary Jesus. Obery M. Hendricks, Jr. says in his book *The Politics of Jesus: Rediscovering the True Revolutionary Nature of Jesus' Teachings and How They Have Been Corrupted*, "To say that Jesus was a political revolutionary is to say that the message he proclaimed not only called for change in individual hearts but also demanded sweeping and comprehensive change in the political, social, and economic structures in his setting in life: colonized Israel."<sup>30</sup>

The ultimate goal of the project is to show teens Jesus and to get them as the Quakers did to follow Jesus in a way that they will be convicted through righteous indignation to change political, social, and economic systems that exist to oppress and

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<sup>30</sup> Hendricks, *The Politics of Jesus*.

unfairly treat individuals. The social issues that this generation of teens must face are unfortunately not too different from the ones that the Quakers faced back in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, this generation of teens has means at their disposal such as mobile devices and social media that can assist in them spreading the gospel of Jesus in a way that can bring social change both near and far.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is perhaps the most well-known figure in recent times that used his spiritual convictions concerning Christ to cause him to stand up and speak out against the unfair treatment of Africans in America during the twentieth century. Dr. King is famous for saying in essence in his letter from a Birmingham Jail that when you practice injustice anywhere in the world then that threatens justice everywhere in the world. It is important to train teens to fight for the justice of people everywhere until there is no injustice anywhere.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS**

The theological foundation of the project, “Training Spiritually Connected and Socially Conscious Students Ages Eleven to Nineteen to Positively Impact Their Communities” will focus on the Social Gospel Movement. Through this lens, this chapter examines how one’s convictions of Jesus and his ministry in its most authentic form will lead to an individual creating ways to bring about social change through the message and life of Jesus. This theological foundation will build upon the biblical foundation of Amos 5:21-24 and Luke 4:18, and build upon the historical foundation of The Quakers. The students who will be a part of this training will use the words, teaching, and preaching of Jesus found in the biblical foundation, the historical precedent found in the historical foundation, as well as theological thought like the Social Gospel Movement to begin to facilitate change in the community in which they serve.

Movements are needed for the perpetuation of society and culture. Sometimes movements are needed to continue the sustainment of the forward progress of society, and other times movements are needed to stop the forward progression of certain thoughts and ideas that exist in society. Neither of these movements are better than the other. Rather, both are of great necessity if society is to be whole and complete. In many societies and communities of the world in general, and America in particular, a movement at the right moment can help in the confrontation of society with its sin and

shortcomings. For example, the Occupy Movement, which was an international movement, was dedicated in opposition to the social and economic inequality that existed in the world. The first widespread Occupy Movement demonstration took place in 2011 and quickly spread mostly in the United States but also around the world in over 951 cities across eighty-two countries.<sup>1</sup>

Another American movement was the Black Panther Party Movement which began as a political organization founded by Bobby Seale and Huey Newton in October 1966 in Oakland, California.<sup>2</sup> The Black Panther Movement began in opposition to police brutality and the mistreatment of black people in Oakland. The movement brought before the eyes of America, sometimes through force, the corruption at the highest levels of government that seeks to continue a system of oppression for its black citizens.

Another movement, which through peaceful means sought to address the injustice that existed in America, was the Civil Right Movement. This movement that existed primarily in the 1950s and 1960s was designed to give equal opportunity and options to African Americans that white Americans already enjoyed. This movement grew and flourished through the weapon of civil disobedience or peaceful protest. The participants of the movement pricked the moral consciousness of the country through boycotts, sit-ins, and demonstrations until the government passed bills and granted rights.

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<sup>1</sup> Derek Thompson, "Occupy the World: The '99 Percent' Movement Goes Global," *Atlantic*, October 15, 2011, accessed October 15, 2011, <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2011/10/occupy-the-world-the-99-percent-movement-goes-global/246757/>; Karla Adam, "Occupy Wall Street Protests Go Global," *Washington Post*, October 15, 2011, accessed November 8, 2011, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/occupy-wall-street-protests-go-global/2011/10/15/gIQAp7kimL\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.0a6fe0705b98](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/occupy-wall-street-protests-go-global/2011/10/15/gIQAp7kimL_story.html?utm_term=.0a6fe0705b98).

<sup>2</sup> William L. Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 155.

In each of these examples, it was a movement that challenged the character of this country. It was a movement that held America's feet to the fire and forced her to live out her creed. It was a movement that caused tension and unrest thus leading to the United States stretching out through uncomfortableness in order to grow. Movements are necessary. Each of the aforementioned movements was essential and acted as a guide to this nation, and so it was for The Social Gospel Movement that began in the twentieth century in America. It, like the rest of these movements, was paramount to its continued growth and development.

The community that the students serve is one that is plagued with violence, poverty, and low esteem of education. Recently, during a small group setting at Mt. Zion Progressive Missionary Baptist Church (MZPMBC) in St. Petersburg Florida, students in middle and high school were asked to raise their hands if they had, within the last year, known of someone their age that died because of violence. During that setting, there were approximately 120 students present and eighty of them raised their hands. This is the type of environment in which the students involved in this training live and do ministry. The Midtown community is the place where the students will participate in their training. The location of MZPMBC is in Midtown and this is where most of the students live. Mostly black persons populate the Midtown community; and therefore, historically, African American life and culture made their homes here. This community is also poverty-ridden with the median household income being much lower than some areas of the city as stated in the synergy chapter. Also stated in that chapter is the fact that the graduation rate is much lower among students and schools in the Midtown community of St. Petersburg. This is a snapshot of the area that the students will serve.



Evidently, the area that the students will serve is one that is in desperate need of a message of hope, help, and healing. The training that includes the understanding of the Social Gospel Movement will help facilitate the change needed in the community. The researcher will examine the issues that existed at the start of the movement, name some of the key figures of the movement (but pay close attention to Walter Rauschenbusch), name some of the issues that the movement addressed, and discuss the results the movement had on society.

According to Dr. Wendy Deichmann, this Social Gospel Movement began with the church after the Civil War in America as a way to deal with the aftermath of the war. She writes:

The social gospel movement in the United States began as a faith-based, grassroots movement of laity and clergy in the aftermath of the Civil War. During this era, American society faced extreme levels of social instability resulting not only from wartime trauma and loss, but also relocation of massive numbers of those emancipated from slavery, a rapidly accelerated pace of both industrialization and urbanization and unprecedented waves of immigration.<sup>3</sup>

As one can see, the end of the Civil War in America brought about many challenges with which the nation would have to deal in the subsequent years. To help navigate the issues and create an environment of moral consciousness, this faith-based movement arose to deal with the woes of society. Any war is traumatic and brings with it personal stress but also social unrest when the war between persons in the same society. In other words, all of the people that the war affected remained in America, thus causing the country as a whole to feel the brutal sting of its severe aftermath. In addition to this social unrest, the country emancipated slaves. Up until this point, the vast majority of slaves never

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<sup>3</sup> Wendy J. Deichmann, "The Social Gospel as a Grassroots Movement," *Church History* 84, no. 1 (March 2015): 203, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost.

experienced any level of freedom or social equality, but the nation had to deal with how to rectify the wrong done to this group of people and not return to the lowness of slavery. Another factor during this time, according to Deichmann was industrialization, urbanization, and immigration. During this time, automation took away many of the jobs done by hand and companies in the country moved towards machine manufacturing. This, of course, would present a problem for those who worked those jobs before. Another issue is during this period communities began to take on the characteristics of cities and were no longer rural or knitted but became urban. Lastly, Deichmann wrote that immigration is also prevalent during this period. Immigrants flooded into American cities during this period after the Civil War. These are three serious issues that would cause a movement, the Social Gospel Movement, to feel the need to have to speak up and voice their stance on equality and fairness in society.

Although these three are major issues during the rise of the Social Gospel Movement, they were sort of general ideas. Deichmann, in the same article, mentions more specific ideas including when she says that:

In addition to the obvious, dire need for reconstruction, the postbellum era was characterized by wage depression, high illiteracy and unemployment rates, extensive poverty, racial discrimination, poor sanitation, and plagues of human trafficking, lynching, liquor abuse and civic corruption. These and other social crises pressed hard upon large segments of the populace.<sup>4</sup>

These specific and devastating issues during this period show the moral decay that existed in America. People did not receive fair wages. Education was at a low point. People could not find jobs. Poor people lived in slums and under unimaginable circumstances. Black and brown people were being mistreated because of their race.

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<sup>4</sup> Deichmann, "The Social Gospel as a Grassroots Movement," 203.

People were getting forcibly lured into sex trafficking rings. Lynching of these now “free” black people occurred, and major corruption existed in every level of government. Due to this sort of mistreatment and mishandling of people, the laity and clergy of the Social Gospel Movement decided that they needed to speak up. They decided that they needed to apply the principles and disciplines of the teaching and life of Jesus to society and envision a nation and world that operates in a godly fashion.

The reason that is so important to “Train Spiritually Connected and Socially Conscious Students Ages Eleven to Nineteen to Positively Impact Their Communities,” is because all of the social woes that existed after the Civil War currently exist. Just as those who were a part of the Social Gospel Movement felt the need to speak to the moral decline of this nation at that time, there needs to be groups of trained people in general; specifically, students from the context, to examine the message of Jesus and its effects on society and see how that message can be used to address the social decline of America. The students involved in this training will be prepared, as those who were a part of the Social Gospel Movement, to look at society in terms of the Kingdom of God where fairness and equality exist. These students will use their spiritual connectedness to Jesus by way of his teaching and application of his word and their social consciousness by way of being aware of the social ills of their community, city, and country, and use the techniques learned to address those issues.

By the close of the nineteenth century and the opening of the twentieth many Christians, mostly Protestants, had a high level of disgust when it came to the social disadvantages of some in America. The social gospel message provided for them rationale from a biblical and religious perspective to deal with poverty and low living in

the slums of cities. The social gospel was a way for these Christians to take their strong desire to see the country give some degree of help with the goal of eventual equality to the least in the community. The movement addressed social problems, especially issues of social justice, such as economic inequality, poverty, crime, racial tensions, slums, unclean environment, poor schools, and the danger of war. Again, the relevance of this theological movement on the project is that most, if not all, of these very issues exist in society today and need to be addressed biblically and religiously.

The teachings of the Social Gospel Movement were directly connected theologically to the Bible. It was built upon two scriptures in particular. One finds the first in the familiar model prayer of Jesus in Matthew which says, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). The second scripture is in Luke when "He answered, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself" (Lk. 10:27). The carriers of the Social Gospel message believed that these two scriptures spoke to the ultimate goal and responsibility of the believer as it relates to Christian ethics. These two scriptures compel one to operate on earth as heaven's kingdom is operating. In heaven's kingdom, there is no prejudice, inequality, classism, poverty, or unfair treatment. Therefore, the societies of the world should operate in like fashion. Jesus perhaps teaches the best example of how one can operate on earth as it is in the kingdom by saying "love God with everything and loving people like you love yourself" (Matt. 22:37-39). It seems very practical, although not easy, that if humanity loves God and their neighbors, and then they would not treat people unjustly, unequally, or as inferior.

Perhaps the biggest issue that needed to be addressed by the Social Gospel Movement is that of race. Race has always been an issue for African American's in this country and the beginnings of the Social Gospel Movement were on the heels of the ending of the Civil War. The Civil War was a pivotal time in American history, primarily, because the main focus of the Civil War was slavery. This was the main cause of the disunion.<sup>5</sup> Gary Gallagher said in a speech titled "Remembering the Civil War" that "issues related to the institution of slavery precipitated secession... It was not states' rights. It was not a tariff. It was not unhappiness with manner and customs that led to secession and eventually to war. It was a cluster of issues profoundly dividing the nation along a fault line delineated by the institution of slavery."<sup>6</sup> It was obvious, that race relations and the institution of slavery is what led to The Civil War; so, naturally, at the end of the war around the time when The Social Gospel Movement was seeking to address social issues in America, they would speak to the institution of slavery and race.

The race issues that were at the forefront of the Social Gospel Movement is very much relevant today. It would then seem that if the need for people to speak to these types of injustices existed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, that same need exists today. That is what this project "Training Spiritually Connected and Socially Conscious Students Ages Eleven to Nineteen to Positively Impact Their Communities" will do in Our Community. Students will be prepared to take on these issues and use the Social Gospel Movement as an example for doing so. Students will examine not only the issue of race in America, but it will look at many other social issues

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<sup>5</sup> Gary Gallagher, "Remembering the Civil War" (speech, Charlottesville, VA, February 21, 2011), accessed October 31, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Gallagher, "Remembering the Civil War."

that the movement spoke out against that were mentioned earlier in this chapter. The students will address those issues in light of the contemporary scene. The project will take a hard stare at police brutality on persons of color, the disproportionate amount of black and brown bodies in the criminal justice system, the effects of poverty in black communities that lead to failing schools, low graduation rates, the spread of life-ending diseases, under or unemployment, and illiteracy. The project will also examine homeless rates, food disparity, and lack of healthcare in black communities and will do all of this in light of the liberating message of Jesus Christ using social and Christian ethics. The students will stand in the tradition of many brave clergy and laymen of the Social Gospel Movement who spoke truth to power.

The men and women of the Social Gospel Movement had a huge responsibility of taking the radical message of Jesus and applying it to the changing and convoluted social climate of America. Many of them were clergy, but some laity and other educators were able to use the biblical thought of Jesus to present ideas to America that would hopefully persuade a change in the country. Its leaders were predominantly associated with the liberal wing of the progressive movement, and most were theologically liberal, although a few were also conservative when it came to their views on social issues.<sup>7</sup> In any case, it took incredible strength to stand against the system and give them the Word of God.

Perhaps, the most famous of those to perpetuate the message of the Social Gospel Movement was Walter Rauschenbusch. Rauschenbusch was a preacher in the Baptist tradition and pastored a church in New York. Rauschenbusch viewed American society as the selfishness of capitalism, so he promoted a form of Christian socialism that

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<sup>7</sup> Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), 785.

supported the creation of labor unions and cooperative economics.<sup>8</sup> In Rauschenbusch ideas, the reason that inequality existed was because of the greed of culture. This greed, according to Rauschenbusch, and those who were apart of Christian socialism would not exist if those who make claims to Jesus were not willing to “have all things in common” (Acts 2:44). The capitalistic country created a society of selfishness because of their greed, thus being willing to abandon the higher calling of Jesus to “love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matt. 22:39) or to operate “in earth as its being done in heaven” (Matt. 6:10) in order to fill their own pockets and feed their own desire for more.

The Bible throughout the Old and New Testaments is peppered with the idea of generosity to the poor, orphaned, widowed, and foreigner regardless of what effort it takes to do so. These texts are not concerned about the year ending profits; they do not consider a company’s bottom line, nor are they are consumed by a country’s surplus potential. Those texts are only concerned about our responsibility to others that we share society with. Those texts only affirm the ministry that Jesus did while on earth, a ministry that places others above oneself so that both can experience the necessities of life through sharing and not selfishness. The famous Christian pastor and social speaker Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said in a 1963 speech: “Light has come into the world, and every man must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism or the darkness of destructive selfishness. This is the judgment. Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, ‘What are you doing for others?’”<sup>9</sup> Dr. King makes it very clear that the moral

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<sup>8</sup> Stanley I. Kutler, ed., *Dictionary of American History*, vol. 7, s.v. “Social Gospel” (New York, NY: Thomson Gale, 2003), Gale Virtual Reference Library, accessed October 31, 2008, <http://link.galegroup.com.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/apps/pub/9780684314150/GVRL?u=tamp44898&sid=GVRL>

<sup>9</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., *Strength to Love* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1963), 72.

question that each person under God should be asking is what I am doing to help my fellow human. Selfishness leads down a dark path to destruction, but altruism gives us a path lite bright enough where all can travel together.

Rauschenbusch wrote in 1907, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. In this writing, he states that: “Whoever uncouples the religious and the social life has not understood Jesus. Whoever sets any bounds for the reconstructive power of the religious life over the social relations and institutions of men, to that extent denies the faith of the Master. The significance of this work is that it spoke of the individual's responsibility toward society.”<sup>10</sup> Rauschenbusch felt like it was impossible to separate one’s religious conviction from their social responsibility. If a person seeks to do so, then Rauschenbusch argues that that person does not understand Jesus. This is the precise message that the project will teach the students that participate. They will be led to understand that the Christian’s social responsibility is within the very fabric of Jesus’s message. There is at no time any separation between the two and if one cannot grasp that then they cannot grasp Jesus in his most authentic form.

Rauschenbusch main thought in his argument for the Social Gospel is an idea that was mentioned earlier and that is: The Kingdom of God. The idea of the Kingdom of God is crucial to Rauschenbusch's proposed theology of the social gospel. He stated that the ideology and “doctrine of the Kingdom of God” of which Jesus Christ “always spoke had been gradually replaced by that of the church.”<sup>11</sup> This is a fascinating idea and leads one

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<sup>10</sup> Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1907), 48-49.

<sup>11</sup> Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1917), 131.



to wonder the significance of the difference. Consider this “Jesus was the first Person to utter the word, “church.” Yet, He framed His ministry in terms of God’s Kingdom breaking into our world, not into a church building.”<sup>12</sup> It seems that Jesus affirms the church but even after mentioning church, still continued to preach the Kingdom of God. Therefore, it is evident that the Kingdom of God is much larger and more global than the church. One site explains it with examples this way:

Though the church and its activities can fit into the Kingdom, you cannot squeeze the Kingdom into the Church. When we try to fit the Kingdom into our church-box, we create church people, instead of Kingdom people! And there is a huge difference between the two:

- Church people – have reduced ministry vision and can’t see past church-bound categories for ministry (i.e., usher, greeter, children’s worker, inviter-of-lost-friends, etc.).
- Kingdom people – have Kingdom vision to think/dream/act outside the box. They want to heal the wounds in their neighborhood, workplace, and community (fatherlessness, addictions, marriages).
- Church people – understand discipleship as primarily about enjoying a closer relationship with God that grows me to spiritual maturity.
- Kingdom people – understand discipleship as the call to lose their life for Christ’s sake so they can participate in His family for His mission.

The Kingdom is not a means to a bigger church; the church is a means to demonstrating the Kingdom!<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Jim Botts, “The Church vs. the Kingdom,” Church Leaders, accessed February 24, 2018, <https://churchleaders.com/outreach-missions/outreach-missions-articles/148827-the-church-vs-the-kingdom.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Botts, “The Church vs. the Kingdom,” accessed February 24, 2018, <https://churchleaders.com/outreach-missions/outreach-missions-articles/148827-the-church-vs-the-kingdom.html>.

This is precisely the message that Rauschenbusch is trying to convey. It is important to operate as in terms of the Kingdom and not the church. He says in his writings, *A*

*Theology for the Social Gospel:*

Of course, such a replacement has cost theology and Christians at large a great deal: the way we view Jesus and the synoptic gospels, the ethical principles of Jesus, and worship rituals have all been affected by this replacement.<sup>14</sup> Rauschenbusch saw four practical advantages in emphasizing the Kingdom of God rather than the Church: The Kingdom of God is not subject to the pitfalls of the Church; it can test and correct the Church; it is a prophetic, future-focused ideology and a revolutionary, social and political force that understands all creation to be sacred; and it can help save the problematic, sinful social order.<sup>15</sup>

In essence, Rauschenbusch is emphasizing that with the focus of Christianity being on the church rather than the Kingdom of God; society has given up a lot including the accurate perspective of Jesus and his ethics. If Jesus is seen as a meek, humble, and timid prophet who only came to get humanity to heaven, then that changes the complete framework of how one operates as a Christian movement. If one viewed Jesus as a fierce revolutionary who challenged the systemic treatment of the poor, disenfranchised, and marginalized, then their view is different. There is a difference in seeing one's Savior as someone who was ridiculed, beaten, and killed and never said a word in his own defense than one who whips grown men because they were distorting religion. The goal is to give the students in this project a glimpse at the historical Jesus that Rauschenbusch embraced.

Although Rauschenbusch was a towering figure in the Social Gospel Movement, he was not alone. There were other figures like Washington Gladden who helped carry the mantle. Beginning in the 1880s, Gladden served as the minister of the First Congregational Church in Columbus, Ohio. In his context, Gladden used his influence to

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<sup>14</sup> Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 133-134.

<sup>15</sup> Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 134-137.

encourage people to stand up for morality and Christian ethics. Gladden encouraged his congregants to play an active role in community life by attacking immorality in their fellow citizens and government officials.<sup>16</sup> Gladden, like Rauschenbusch, allowed his Christian convictions to move him towards action, socially. This first started with his pulpit messages and spread out beyond the church. It is said that Gladden preached two forty-five-minute sermons each Sunday. In the morning, he preached on living the Christian life. In the evening, he preached on social problems. The evening sermon was printed in *The Ohio State Journal* the next day on page one.<sup>17</sup> He used a whole forty-five-minute sermon to address the social woes of the country and then shared his convictions of Christ with society while encouraging his congregants to meet the needs of the unfortunate. This is just another example of Christians being so moved by the message of Jesus until they were willing to follow him authentically. The authentic following of Jesus must be done as he leads in revolutionary fashion with boldness and authority while seeking to break free from the social acceptance of injustice, mistreatment, and inequality and not as he has been watered down.

Howard Thurman in his book *Jesus and the Disinherited* seems to bear witness to the effects of the watered-down version of Jesus when he wrote:

I do not ignore the theological and metaphysical interpretation of the Christian doctrine of salvation. But the underprivileged everywhere have long since abandoned any hope that this type of salvation deals with the crucial issues by which their days are turned into despair without consolation. The basic fact is that Christianity as it was born in the mind of this Jewish teacher and thinker appears as a technique of survival for the oppressed. That it became, through the intervening years, a religion of the powerful and the dominant, used sometimes as

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<sup>16</sup> Nell Irwin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: A Grassroots History of the Progressive Era* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 2008).

<sup>17</sup> Timothy C. Ahrens, "Washington Gladden: Prophet of Truth and Justice," 2011, 3, accessed May 15, 2019, <http://www.first-church.org/Downloads/gladdengreenlawnspeech.pdf>.

an instrument of oppression, must not tempt us into believing that it was thus in the mind and life of Jesus. "In him was life; and the life was the light of men." Wherever his spirit appears, the oppressed gather fresh courage; for he announced the good news that fear, hypocrisy, and hatred, the three hounds of hell that track the trail of the disinherited, need have no dominion over them.<sup>18</sup>

This shows how the culture's change in interpretation of Jesus can completely distort the reality of Christianity. One can actually take a revolutionary and reduce him to someone who is only concerned about capitalism and then heaven.

In conclusion, it is important to take a moment and look at some of the social issues in the late nineteenth, early twentieth centuries and examine how those issues look or fit into the context to show proof as to why this teaching of the Social Gospel Movement is just as relevant today as it was when it first began. Economic inequality is still a big issue in America in the twenty-first century. According to the website [pewresearch.org](http://pewresearch.org), the gap between white and black household income is still large. This article says:

The black-white income gap in the U.S. has persisted. The difference in median household incomes between whites and blacks has grown from about \$19,000 in 1967 to roughly \$27,000 in 2011 (as measured in 2012 dollars). Median black household income was 59% of median white household income in 2011, up modestly from 55% in 1967; as recently as 2007, black income was 63% of white income.<sup>19</sup>

As one can see, there is still a persistent economic gap between blacks and whites even today. This is not only a national issue, but these types of numbers also exist in the Midtown community when measured against St. Petersburg as a whole. This means that

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<sup>18</sup> Howard Thurman, *A Strange Freedom: The Best of Howard Thurman on Religious Experience and Public Life* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1976), 143.

<sup>19</sup> Drew Desilver, "Five Facts about Economic Inequality," *Pew Research Center*, accessed January 7, 2014, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/01/07/5-facts-about-economic-inequality/>.

the people who live in the community and attend church are living on the lower end of the economic gap.

Another issue that was identified as a problem for the social gospel movement was poverty. There is clear evidence that shows the mark of poverty in the community. Gypsy Gallardo, the founder of the 2020 Plan, which is an organization dedicated to decreasing the poverty rate by 30% by the year 2020 wrote an article October 2017 in which she states that, “74% of the people who live in South St. Petersburg are poor and black.”<sup>20</sup> Those are the astounding number of people that clergy have direct responsibility of ministering to. Not only do these issues that keep black and brown people underemployed but there are also systematic structures that keep them incarcerated hence leading to another social injustice that needs to be addressed. Michelle Alexander writes in her breakthrough book *The New Jim Crow*:

In the era of colorblindness, it is no longer socially permissible to use race, explicitly, as a justification for discrimination, exclusion, and social contempt. So we don't. Rather than rely on race, we use our criminal justice system to label people of color “criminals” and then engage in all the practices we supposedly left behind. Today it is perfectly legal to discriminate against criminals in nearly all the ways that it was once legal to discriminate against African Americans. Once you're labeled a felon, the old forms of discrimination—employment discrimination, housing discrimination, denial of the right to vote, denial of educational opportunity, denial of food stamps and other public benefits, and exclusion from jury service—are suddenly legal. As a criminal, you have scarcely more rights, and arguably less respect, than a black man living in Alabama at the height of Jim Crow. We have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Gypsy Gallardo, “Ten Things We All Should Know about the Rapid Pace of Black Poverty Reduction in St. Pete,” brief, October 2017, 1.

<sup>21</sup> Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2012), 2.

As stated, there is a systematic culture in place that seeks to keep blacks and brown out of society through mass incarceration which is in a real sense a new form of legalized segregation. Many of the students who will be trained have family members who have been negatively affected by this unjust and unfair treatment of African American in this country and have been or are currently incarcerated in the penal system. Not only are there laws that have been created to incarcerate these men and boys; but there are also laws to limit their assimilation back into mainstream society by denying jobs, voting rights, and educational opportunities once they are released. In many cases, this restriction in rights after a person completed their time leads to them being imprisoned again. Then there are laws they say once a person has been imprisoned so many times, they can spend the rest of their lives incarcerated. This systematic problem has been compared to slavery and slavery was an issue at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth during the dawn of the Social Gospel Movement. Just based off of these few examples, it is clear that the need for the teachings and theory of the Social Gospel Movement is just as important today as it ever has been.

The project “Training Spiritually Connected and Socially Conscious Students Ages Eleven to Nineteen to Positively Impact Their Communities,” will have a transforming effect on the lives of the students and their communities. They will understand through the biblical writing of the Prophet Amos (Am. 5: 21-24) and Luke of Jesus (Lk. 4:18), the historical example of George Fox and the Religious Society of Friends, the theological framework of the Social Gospel Movement through people like Walter Rauschenbusch. Rauschenbusch displayed the importance and necessity of using relationships with Jesus and religious formation to bring about positive change in

communities by following Jesus's pattern while on earth teaching about the Kingdom of God. This training will lead these students to rethink their social obligation as citizens of humanity and members of the Christian community. The students will engage in service by visiting soup kitchens, clothing donations, and participating in community discussions about race and police brutality. Their lives will share Jesus's message which will be changed forever. As stated earlier, the students will take a hard stare at police brutality on persons of color, the disproportionate amount of black and brown bodies in the criminal justice system, the effects of poverty in black communities that lead to failing schools, low graduation rates, the spread of life-ending diseases, under or unemployment, and illiteracy. The project will also examine homeless rates, food disparity, and a lack of healthcare in black communities. This training will be a cohesive look at Jesus, the Bible, the Social Gospel Movement, and society and then cause the teens to ask, "what must I do?"

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS**

Religion has a major impact on the life of a child when they are raised in a family with strong religious beliefs and practices. Attending religious institutions and participating in the activities, can completely shape the life of a child and their family. Religious practices become ingrained in each generation from the oldest to the youngest. These practices include reciting prayers before meals and bedtime, expressing thanksgiving during social gatherings, and attending services at religious facilities. Not only does religion shape the individual and their family, but it also shapes the community. Growing up in a community where religion is held in high regard by all, results in the community being shaped by religious beliefs even if everyone does not believe completely or attend religious institutions regularly. The concept of religion, its impact on the people who practice it, its ability to shape society, and being able to recognize that shaping is fascinating. Witnessing that positive shaping of the family and the community by its religious environment demonstrates the necessity of creating a contemporary model in which students are empowered to have a positive impact on their communities.

This theoretical foundation will build upon the biblical foundation of Amos 5:21-24, upon the historical foundation of The Quakers, and the theological foundation of the Social Gospel Movement. The students who will be a part of this training will use the



words, teaching, and preaching of Jesus found in the biblical foundation, the historical precedent found in the historical foundation, theological thought like the Social Gospel Movement, as well as aspects of sociology begin to facilitate change in the community in which they serve. The project is entitled, “Training Spiritually Connected and Socially Conscious Students Ages Eleven to Nineteen to Positively Impact Their Communities,” will take a look at the discipline of sociology to build a theoretical premise for this work. First, the discussion will occur regarding the recent and relevant work done in the church to address this, specifically the work of Christian Smith. Secondly, the researcher will evaluate how different sociological perspectives inform the work especially that of race and ethnic relations.

The resource that best facilitates this portion of the project is the work of Christian Smith who deals in part with the sociology of religion. His primary group of study is actually the same age group of students that will be involved in the research project. This is important because Smith’s research helps compare apples to apples when examining students and religion. The sociology of religion is the study of the beliefs, practices and organizational forms of religion using the tools and methods of the discipline of sociology. This objective investigation may include the use of both quantitative methods (surveys, polls, demographic and census analysis) and qualitative approaches such as participant observation, interviewing, and analysis of archival, historical and documentary materials.<sup>1</sup> As one can witness, the work of Smith is fascinating because he collects imperial data through scientific measures to examine how

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<sup>1</sup> Hartford Institute for Religion Research, “The Sociological Study of Religion,” Hartford Seminary, n.d., accessed December 2, 2018, [http://hirr.hartsem.edu/sociology/about\\_the\\_field.html](http://hirr.hartsem.edu/sociology/about_the_field.html).

religion, the different forms of religion and how religion affects society. Furthermore, Smith, again, does his research with the specific demographic of teens.

Christian Smith's work is built foundationally upon the early sociological work of religion from a classical sociology standpoint. It is important to look briefly at these ideas in order to appreciate the work of Smith. Although the sociology of religion is its own branch of sociology currently, it has not always been the case; it first was just a subcategory of the classical view of sociology. Sociology is the scientific study of society, patterns of social relationships, social interaction, and culture of everyday life.<sup>2</sup> As one can witness, sociology examines society as a whole with its relationships, culture, and interactions, the subcategory of religion examines the social and cultural results of religion on society.

Max Weber is perhaps the most familiar of these early sociologists to study this area of religion. He was considered along with Émile Durkheim and Karl Marx as one of the founders of sociology.<sup>3</sup> His work began in 1987 when he did an analysis on suicide rates among the Christian population in general, Catholicism and Protestantism, specifically. He continued on to examine the area of social economics by seeing how Protestants and Catholics had different viewpoints on economics and wages, and the results of both. This was sort of the birth of what we currently refer to as the sociology of religion. Out of these examinations, came future sociologist that would lead society to the work of Christian Smith.

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<sup>2</sup> Dictionary.com, s.v. "sociology," accessed December 2, 2018, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/sociology>.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber* (Boston, MA: Cambridge University, 1971), preface viii.

Christian Smith's work informs the project because it exposes why students who are emerging adults are disengaged in church and in ministry. "Training Spiritually Connected and Socially Conscious Students Ages Eleven to Nineteen to Positively Impact Their Communities," is to engage this population of students. It will help them to see the importance of the context, which is a progressive church in a poverty-infested community. It will also help them to understand the relevance of the primary biblical text of Amos 5:21-24 which is primarily the historical precedent of the Quakers movement, and the determination of the Social Gospel Movement. The goal is to empower them to change their community with the message of Jesus. It is of utmost importance to embrace Smith's work so one can understand the current thinking, engagement, and disengagement of this population. The following is extrapolated from an interview done in *The Christian Journal* in January 2011 with Smith concerning his work and the data gathering process that lead to his findings.

Answers to these questions are beginning to surface from the mass of data collected in the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) and reported in *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (2009) by Christian Smith (with Patricia Snell). This book reports on NSYRs wave 3 of data collection, which included a telephone survey (N=2,458) and in-depth interviews (N=230) of 18- to 23-year-olds. This landmark longitudinal study, which began in 2002 when the respondents were 13 to 17 years of age, is considered by many to be the most important current research on religion and adolescents, and now emerging adults.<sup>4</sup>

It is clear that Smith went through a thorough data collection process in order to inform the conclusions for his work. Smith also dedicated years to following these students in order to track accurate results. Again, this is extremely important to the project because

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<sup>4</sup> Jane Thayer, "Inside Story of a Landmark Study on the Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults: An Interview with Christian Smith," *Christian Education Journal: Research on Educational Ministry* 8, no. 2 (January 1, 2011): 332.

the students that Smith engaged are precisely the same age range as those engaged in the project. Smith's work will help inform the researcher into how to examine the behavior and actions of this demographic in order to help train them to spiritually and socially impact their communities. One of the most important facts that one can learn from Smith's work is found early in the fore stated article when he said:

We have a lot more to learn about what happens in this relatively new—meaning in the last decades—phase of life, especially if we are interested in religion because it's the age of life in the American life course that has the least amount of religious involvement and the most amount of disconnection. It's a long time between ages 18 and 29 to be formed as a self. We have good reason to think that what happens during these years will significantly affect what happens in the longer term when they settle down. Part of it is just that we started out with teenagers, we kept following them, and then they turned into this age. So we kept going with it.<sup>5</sup>

Smith makes it very clear that students this age who are emerging into adults are traditionally disconnected from religion, a process that starts earlier in teen years; however, it is also clear from Smith's work that what is done during these years has the ability to affect what their lives will look like in the long term of life. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that leaders begin to create new narratives and good life practices early in their teen years so they may live a life of benefit. This is important to this project because leaders are training teens to impact their communities positively with the message of Jesus, so if we can indeed teach this lesson and begin to inform and infect their thinking now to being social and spiritual, then one has the unique ability to make a lifelong behavior of students turned adults impacting their communities. The need to begin this process early in a teen's religious formation is so important as stated by the research of Smith when he states: "... a lot of the religious commitment and practice,

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<sup>5</sup> Thayer, "Inside Story," 332.

belief and experience during the teenage years continue. If you are hoping that 18- to 23-year-olds are serious about their religious faith and involved, almost certainly they need to have been serious about their religious faith as teenagers 5 years earlier.”<sup>6</sup>

One can see from the demographic, that Smith study began at eighteen; however Smith shows the reader that if they are to be successful, then they must start the process of seriously seeking to shape their religious identity at least five years earlier. This would put the reader at the age of thirteen, which would place us the participants in the age bracket in the project. Smith seems to confirm through his research that the timing of the project is perfect for the goal of making lifelong faith followers.

Another idea that is important to note is that Smith’s sociological research is that students’ default through this project making them more “religious” which according to Smith gives the students a higher chance of continuing this process into adulthood.

Smith states:

It is not usual for really highly religious teens to go all the way to disengage. Usually, they will just drop somewhat in their religiousness. Those who end up being really disengaged from religion probably started off only moderately religious as teenagers. The higher up on a religion scale one starts as a teenager, the higher up one is likely to end up later, in most cases. The causal factors that might knock somebody out of that pattern are sort of the inverse of what I just said: As teenagers they were on the surface highly religious; their parents made them go to church; they were in a youth group, but they didn’t really internalize it, it didn’t mean much to them; they had a lot of doubts; they were just going along socially.<sup>7</sup>

Smith is clear that one has a much higher chance of impacting students toward a life of engagement through the project because they are engaging them earlier in their religious formation. His research showed that the students that become disengaged later in life are

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<sup>6</sup> Thayer, “Inside Story,” 332.

<sup>7</sup> Thayer, “Inside Story,” 333.

likely those who had a level of disengagement earlier on as a teen. These are the student that although they may have been a part of a student ministry, they were never really challenged to be involved. As they became adults, their level of engagement remains the same. This is also true according to the research for students who are moderately engaged as well as those who are completely engaged. Whatever level or degree that a student is challenged to be engaged earlier in their religious formation, the higher the likelihood of them staying engaged. Again, the key is to engage the students early and often by not only informing their religious formation but also by resolving the doubt that exists within their minds concerning religious ideas. The project's small group settings will help in the reaching of this goal. The working toward this goal is also affirmed in Smith's research when he says:

So, if you care about 18- to 29-year-olds, it matters what you do when they are 10 and 14 and 16. You simply take the factors that we identified as being most important earlier in life and invest in people's religious training and experiences. Actually, a lot of churches try to do this. For example, one significant factor for teenagers is being able to resolve religious doubts. That suggests engaging teenagers—not just teaching them and leaving it at that—but engaging them in a back-and-forth discussion, helping them sorts through intellectually, emotionally, and existentially: Does this make sense? Do you have any doubts? Does this really work for you? If you leave young people with doubts, they will affect them later on.<sup>8</sup>

The project will inform them through the different forms of engagement with the goal convincing them of the necessity of following the model of Jesus early through continued engagement; but also help to create an open environment where they are able to ask questions and participate in a dialogue that helps alleviate their questions and soothe their doubts. These groups will also help with their positive religious training and experiences. The training of the project is meant to bring about the full engagement of the students in

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<sup>8</sup> Thayer, "Inside Story," 336.

embracing the materials, concept, and think that is needed to create a lifetime of impact on their communities.

The natural hypothesis when it comes to the work of Smith and the project, “Training Spiritually Connected and Socially Conscious Students Ages Eleven to Nineteen to Positively Impact Their Communities,” is that these students will have a greater awareness of their responsibility as a believer as well as a citizen of humanity to bring about effective change in the lives of people that they come into contact with each day. Through these different pieces of training, exercises, teachings, and projects, students will be connected to Jesus in a way that is significant to their formation. The students will be introduced to the Jesus that Obery Hendricks spoke about in his book, *The Politics of Jesus: Rediscovering the True Revolutionary Nature of Jesus’ Teachings and How They Have Been Corrupted*, where he challenges the reader to view Jesus opposite of the traditional Christian European view of a meek, humble, and misunderstood man, rather see him as a strong and confident revolutionary.

Hendricks says about this Jesus “To say that Jesus was a political revolutionary is to say that the message he proclaimed not only called for a change in individual hearts but also demanded sweeping and comprehensive change in the political, social, and economic structures in his setting in life.”<sup>9</sup> This is the view of Jesus that is necessary for students to capture if they are to bring about the revolutionary change that is needed in the community. The desire is for the students in the project to experience the essence of Jesus insomuch that they are not able to imagine being a follower of Jesus without having

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<sup>9</sup> Obery Hendricks, *The Politics of Jesus: Rediscovering the True Revolutionary Nature of Jesus’ Teachings and How They Have Been Corrupted* (New York, NY: Doubleday Religious Publishing Group, 2006).

an impact on community thus being a revolutionary in their own right. Again, if one is successful in this endeavor, then they will, as Smith, suggests have the opportunity of creating a community of Christians who will live the latter years of their life in like fashion, which is the ultimate goal.

Another important idea that Smith raises when considering this sociological idea of emerging adults and religion is how one must combat the negativity of the culture in the teen's life. This is important to the project because it is the overall goal of what one seeks to do and that is to help students change their communities while dealing with the culture. Their culture may be deteriorating and all the time becoming more and more self-absorbed and selfish; but this training is to insist through the biblical, historical, theological, and theoretical examinations that they must remain concerned as Jesus was about their communities. Smith says:

Culture is powerful. But I think what it really comes down to is to prepare them for what's coming. Before young people hit emerging adulthood, get them to see ahead of time: "Here is the world you are heading into, here are the challenges you are going to have, and here are the kinds of temptations you are going to have. You're going to have to decide what kind of person you're going to be." Help them to personalize their faith, to ground their identities, and to be willing and able to be different. If people are not willing and able to be different, then they just get swept along. Teach them to say, "Well, that's the way most people are, but I don't have to be that way." That's something that gets formed from day one.<sup>10</sup>

This is precisely what this training is geared to do and that is to help the students see and understand the culture, but do not blend in with the culture. Instead for them to manage to live outside of the influence of the culture by asking questions similar to those of Smith in order for them to accept a new narrative while also creating a sustaining pattern of spiritual and social responsibility like that of Jesus. This goal again is achieved through

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<sup>10</sup> Thayer, "Inside Story," 337.



the sociological model of Smith, but also through the biblical, historical, and theological foundations of this project.

The biblical foundation for this project is found in Amos 5:21-24, in this text, there is a clear departure from the culture of that time. The culture of the prophet Amos was a time of great empire influence and prosperity, but a lack of God's law being practiced. The law of God required that the Nation of Israel would walk in the way of the Lord by practicing justice; however, there was no justice anywhere to be seen, so God sends this unknown dresser of the sycamore tree named Amos to address the powers that be. That is to speak truth to power. The Prophet Amos ultimately says that God is not impressed or pleased with their festivals, burnt offerings, songs, or sacrifices because they are not practicing justice. This shows how much God values justice being displayed by those who follow God. This project is trying to point out and also that Smith is showing that leaders have to raise a religious generation who will live in a culture but create their own narrative about what God wants.

The project will train students to not just be concerned with religious days, songs, sacrifices, or services, but God is requiring them to do justice in the world, in general, but their communities in particular. This is what these spiritually connected, and socially conscious students will learn that God is requiring leaders to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, give drink to the thirsty, visit those that are sick and in prison (Matt. 25:35-45). They will be trained to know that justice is not some campaign that they pick up from time to time; rather justice is something that they do all of the time. It is not optional, but it is within the very fabric of the religious formation. This training of authentic

followership, at an early age, will help lead, according to Smith, a higher possibility of these teens retaining a high priority of religious value and practice.

The historical portion of this project takes a look at The Religious Society of Friends, commonly known as the Quakers, which were started by George Fox in the mid-1600s. The movement was started in opposition to tension and turmoil that existed in the Church of England. The primary goal of this Christian organization was to speak out against the injustices that they perceived to violate the idea of God creating everyone equally. Some of the most well-known things that were spoken against by The Quakers were the opposition to slavery, an affirmation of women in ministry, and the light of God in all people. This is important to this project because it is training students to be informed by their personal relationship with God through Jesus to help shape their responsibility for social action in the community. This was precisely the work of The Quakers. These ideas also tie in with the work of Christian Smith from a sociological standpoint in that it shows how early religious formation can shape the foundation of one's life as emerging adults as well as throughout their lifetime.

George Fox was driven by a calling of God that he received very early in life. Fox says this of himself, "When I came to eleven years of age," he said, "I knew pureness and righteousness; for, while I was a child, I was taught how to walk to be kept pure. The Lord taught me to be faithful, in all things, and to act faithfully two ways; inwardly to God, and outwardly to man."<sup>11</sup> This formation of faith was started at the time when Smith says that the journey towards a life of high religious following should take place. Smith

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<sup>11</sup> George Fox and John L. Nickalls, *The Journal of George Fox* (London, UK: Religious Society of Friends, 1975).

states: “One of the implications of our observation about continuity is that what you do earlier in life matters for what comes out later in life.”<sup>12</sup>

It seems that Smith’s research is an affirmation to the faith journey of Fox. This is extremely important because these two examples teach that we are able to train students spiritually and socially. This is a reminder of the Christian proverb that says, “Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray” (Prov. 22:6).

In each of these examples, there is an emphasis on the early stage in which one begins to teach and train students for Christian living. The project, “Training Spiritually Connected and Socially Conscious Students Ages Eleven to Nineteen to Positively Impact Their Communities,” is informed by these ideas. Thus, it will begin the training at the age of eleven with the expectation of using the principles and ideas learned through the foundation papers which includes Smith’s work to give training that will not only give students a deep resounding, relevant, and real vertical relationship with Jesus, but also a dedicated and devoted horizontal relationship with humankind.

As a result, the exposure will lead them to do as George Fox and The Quakers did by speaking out and up against what they perceived as injustice in the world. These students will not only see the examples of the aforementioned people, but they will also hear the voices of others perhaps more well-known (to them). Christians who allowed their spiritual connectedness to drive their social consciousness. Persons like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who is perhaps the premier figure of the twentieth century and also a Baptist preacher. Dr. King says things like: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice

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<sup>12</sup> Thayer, “Inside Story,” 336.

everywhere.”<sup>13</sup> This quote was in *The Letter from a Birmingham Jail* which, was written to other members of the clergy who seemingly did not allow their religious beliefs to drive their social actions. King like Fox, and as studied by Smith, started his religious formation at an early age as well. The depth of his spiritual journey begins when he was very young and continued into what Smith calls his emerging adult years and throughout his life. It seems that Dr. King is a testament to the conclusions of Smith sociological work.

Another point that is worth mentioning from Christian Smith’s work is the emphasis that he puts on parental engagement in the religious development of emerging adults. Smith says:

Another huge example is parents. There is no guarantee between how a parent lives and how the kids will turn out and everybody knows that, but there is a pretty strong probabilistic argument that one of the rules of thumb that we talk about is that we get what we are. There’s the powerful dynamics of social reproduction and socialization of the next generation learning more than they even realize from the prior. So simply, if parents want their kids to be strong people of faith, then that’s what they need to be. It’s not rocket science. The other thing is non-parental adults in the congregation. For the youth minister, other adults, relatives, and friends to build relationships with teenagers and get to know them, invest in them—that helps to create a bond that strengthens their faith over time.<sup>14</sup>

Smith affirms the fact that more is caught than taught. Students will do more of what they see than what is said to them. This is the reason why students from families where there is strong Christian living from the parental guide, there is a greater opportunity for students to thrive and become committed religious followers into adulthood. This is important because the project, by default, will seek to engage parents as they assist their

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<sup>13</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> Thayer, “Inside Story,” 336.

children in keeping the goals of the project. Through this sociological information and prior experience, the students with a parent or parents who are authentic religious followers are more likely to succeed in this training immediately as well as long term. Furthermore, the most recent examples of George Fox and Dr. King both bear witness to the strong presence of religiously involved parents early in their Christian development.

Smith's work not only informs the project as a whole but the theological foundation in particular. The theological foundation was on the Social Gospel Movement that took place in America in the late nineteenth early twentieth centuries. Dr. Wendy Deichmann says this of that movement:

The social gospel movement in the United States began as a faith-based, grassroots movement of laity and clergy in the aftermath of the Civil War. During this era, American society faced extreme levels of social instability resulting not only from wartime trauma and loss but also relocation of massive numbers of those emancipated from slavery, a rapidly accelerated pace of both industrialization and urbanization and unprecedented waves of immigration.<sup>15</sup>

Smith's work interacts with the Social Gospel Movement from the standpoint of culture. Smith speaks about how students who have been committed participants of the religious community and are emerging adults must stand up and be willing to go counterculture in order to defend their religious principles. To illustrate this, Smith says, "Help them to personalize their faith, to ground their identities, and to be willing and able to be different. If people are not willing and able to be different, then they just get swept along. Teach them to say, "Well, that's the way most people are, but I don't have to be that way."<sup>16</sup> Here, Smith makes it clear that students must personalize the faith in order to

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<sup>15</sup> Wendy J. Deichmann, "The Social Gospel as a Grassroots Movement," *Church History* 84, no. 1 (March 2015): 203–206, accessed December 20, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0009640715000050>.

<sup>16</sup> Thayer, "Inside Story," 338.

create their own identities as it relates to being different from culture. There is a challenge within his statement for students to not just be swept away by blending into the culture; but rather they should have their own cultural identity that is shaped by their faith. This is important to the theological foundation because those like Walter Rauschenbusch and others who were proponents of the Social Gospel Movement used their faith and religious formation to go counter-culture of the times. Again, this movement took place soon after the Civil War in America at a time where social inequality was at its worst. It would have been easier for these groups of Christians to just fall into the standard of the culture. These religious leaders, instead, stood against the culture and was in the world but not of the world (Jn. 15:19).

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the theme of sociology in emerging adults is an important piece in the puzzle of the project “Training Spiritually Connected and Socially Conscious Students Ages Eleven to Nineteen to Positively Impact Their Communities.” Without this very important piece, this puzzle would not turn out as profound as it has. It is of utmost importance that individuals recognize how critical it is for this foundational part of the Doctor of Ministry project to be included. This process is comparable to building a house. It is important that if one is going to have a house that is sustainable, they must have a solid foundation of which the house will rest. The biblical, historical, theological and theoretical are all the foundational pillars for which the Doctor of Ministry project will stand. Each part is uniquely important in its own way. The theoretical is the pillar in the last of the foundations which are perfect because it is the one that takes a look at what

other disciplines are saying about the project's focus. In this case, Christian Smith has done a lot of work in helping one to understand the necessity of beginning the process early in training teens to take their religious beliefs serious.

This is the gist of what the author seeks to do in this project. It will begin as early as eleven at training students to be spiritually connected and socially conscious.

Spiritually connected in that they will have a real and authentic relationship with Jesus Christ and socially conscious in that they will follow Jesus in the way that he leads and through being aware of where people were and being sure to meet their felt needs and speak up for the oppressed and disenfranchised. This sociological work presented in the theoretical foundation confirms the need to provide this vital training as soon as possible to students so they can begin the journey of changing their communities through their spiritual connectedness and socially consciousness.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **PROJECT ANALYSIS**

#### **Introduction**

The project “Training Spiritually Connected and Socially Conscious Students Ages Eleven to Nineteen to Positively Impact Their Communities” seeks to give students the tools necessary for them to use their spiritual identity as a way of making them socially aware. Throughout the scope of this work, it became very apparent that the church community as a whole has not placed as strong an emphasis on Christians social responsibility as it has on spiritual identity; many of times creating communities that are only concerned about people getting to heaven and not on how they live on earth. This project is designed to turn that tide and begin to reform the future of the church from the bottom up by connecting for students the necessity of both the spiritual and social and highlighting that they are both present in the fabric of Christian ideas.

The context in which my project took place is Mt. Zion Progressive Missionary Baptist Church. The church has a long history of being a socially relevant church that seeks to impact its immediate community. However, this task has not been completely done in the lives of the students who attend the church. For these reasons, my project will focus on training teens to positively affect their communities by being spiritually connected and socially conscious. I hypothesize that if I can effectively achieve this goal then three important things will happen. First, teens will connect their faith in Jesus to



their responsibilities to be managers of change. Secondly, there will be a real impact on the community especially within a two-mile radius of our church. Thirdly, I believe these teens will lead to change and make the future of the church brighter and better.

I seek to learn through the implementation of this project how we, as a church community, can change the social climate of our world through the training of teens that have a spiritual connection with Jesus Christ and have seen how that connection calls them to be concerned about their neighbors. If this goal is obtained, then we may be able to replicate our ministry throughout this country and thus change a whole generation of teens who will change the world.

I am confident that building this bridge between the spiritual and the social for teens will be a catalyst for how they see Christ, church, and culture. This will lead to a great spiritual change in church and social change in the community; thus allowing teens to build authentic faith and live out the pure practice of Jesus in the gospels. It is evident through the research that there is a need for this type of effective change in the community in which we live; and this issue can be successfully addressed through the life and work of teens who are spiritually connected and socially conscious.

The research conducted up to this point helped to inform the project implementation by providing the resources needed to create a holistic approach. The research has changed me and will allow me to use its foundation to help in the project. My biblical foundation provides a biblical basis for the spiritual connectedness. The population of project participants are teens between the ages of eleven to nineteen who are already identified as Christian. I think my biblical foundation will give this group of students an understanding of what God is saying about both their spiritual identity and

their social responsibility. Amos 5:21-24 does a perfect job of bringing both of these ideas to light for students. In this text, God is showing the Prophet Amos and the Nation of Israel as a whole the strong braided links between their being connected to God and their practicing justice and righteousness in the world. Amos, an eight-century prophet to the Northern Kingdom of Israel is given a prophetic word from God to give to the nation concerning their lack of justice practicing. By this time in the history of the nation, they are disregarding the poor, orphans and widows and not using just practices when dealing with others. As a result of this disregard for justice, God sends word through Amos that he is shutting up heaven until justice is being practiced again. God says in essence to these people that “I will not hear from you, look upon you, or smell your incense until you begin the free flowing practice of justice again.” This is precisely what this project will teach the participants. We want students to see through this text how much God insists that we as God connected people are also socially conscious and concerned.

The historical foundation part of the research will inform this project as well by highlighting for the participants a historical period when a group of Christians did exactly what I am asking them to do. The Religious Society of Friends or Quakers lead by George Fox used their conviction about Christ, formed by their spiritual identity, to lead them to seeking justice for oppressed people in England. The importance of this movement on the project, “Training Spiritually Connected and Socially Conscious Students Ages Eleven to Nineteen to Positively Impact Their Communities,” is that we too are training students through the example of this historical movement to be involved in priestly ministry work. We will train them to understand that no matter how young they are, they must be concerned about doing the work that Jesus did by feeding the

hungry, clothing the naked, freeing the falsely imprisoned, visiting those who are sick and in prison, standing up for the oppressed and disenfranchised, and speaking out against injustice anywhere. The students will be informed by The Quakers who made a reputation of speaking out against the injustice that existed in society. The students will see and learn from this example.

The Social Gospel Movement will be used during this project implementation to show how one's social responsibility by way of their spiritual identity can not only impact a society as it was done by the Quakers in England, but to show specifically how this idea affected American culture during the twentieth century. The theological foundation of this project will show how this country can be changed when individuals share convictions of Christ and are also convicted enough to move and do something about the injustices and unfair treatment that exists in America. Students will be challenged to take a close look at leaders in the Social Gospel Movement that they may not know to show how although rare, it is not impossible to move socially based off of your spiritual identity. We will also identify individuals who may not have technically been a part of the Social Gospel Movement but who was very much a part of awakening the moral consciousness of America through gospel and biblical means. These individuals will be well known people like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who most of our students know and can identify with as an agent of change in this country and as a Christian.

Finally, the theoretical foundation of sociology of religion, more specifically the work done by Christian Smith will inform the research more so than the participants particularly. Smith research shows us that we are recruiting the right age group to use in

this project in order to provide the best results of making lifelong disciples out of these students. Christian Smith's work gives the project hope that if we can be successful in our training then there is a higher likelihood that this research will ripple for a lifetime having unimaginable results. The theoretical foundation is incredibly important because we were able to not only do a project; but we were able to see how this project can bear fruit beyond the moments of the project and perhaps throughout their Christian journey in life. There is no other population according to the theoretical foundation that would be more suitable for this project or will produce a possible longer effect than the one that we are using for this project. It is these foundations that gives me confidence in a projected outcome that will be favorable not only for my project and participants, but also for the church and the community in which they reside.

### **Methodology**

The methodology used will be qualitative in nature. The sixteen students used in this project were from the ages of eleven to nineteen with various backgrounds. The students are regularly and active participants in the student ministry of Mt. Zion Progressive Missionary Baptist Church. The students did an evaluation criterion. This was accomplished by the use of a pre-evaluation and post-evaluation that was completed by the students. The questions on the pre and post-evaluation were exactly the same except for one extra question on the post-evaluation that asked, "Having participated in this process, how likely do you think you are to making a lifelong commitment to being spiritual and social in regards to your Christian Identity?" I think this question was important because it showed the success of the project, specifically to show, if student's

hearts were changed as a result of this four-week study. The third component was the actual field testing that took place over a four-week period on Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights consecutively. Following the four weeks of field testing, post evaluations were given.

### **Project Implementation**

The project was a four-week series of meetings consisting of a Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday, respectfully. The first day meeting was Wednesday June 5, 2019 at the Mt. Zion Progressive Missionary Baptist Church Youth Building (MZPMBCYB). The attendants that evening were the facilitator, two adult volunteers, sixteen students, and their parents. Each session and fieldtrip had a quote connected to it to help bring clarity to its purpose and meaning. The students were later engaged in conversation about the quote for the purpose of reflection.

#### *Session One*

The quote for the first session set the tone for our time together for both the students participating in the project and their parents. Session one quote was by Walter Rauschenbusch and it states, "Whoever uncouples the religious and the social life has not understood Jesus. Whoever sets any bounds for the reconstructive power of the religious life over the social relations and institutions of men, to that extent denies the faith of the Master."<sup>1</sup> The facilitator wanted to make it clear from the beginning that our goal was to

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1907).

couple together religious and social life and wanted to give the strong language of Rauschenbusch to illustrate how important it is to “uncouple” the two or not separate.

During this session, the facilitator gave an overview of the program complete with project activities, fieldtrips, and dates. The students and parents were given forms to fill out agreeing to be a part of this project. The forms consisted of information pertaining to their names, addresses, dates of birth, contact information, parents name and contact, emergency contacts, medication information, and their signatures for consent. Attached in Appendix A is a copy of the project permission slip as it was given to the students. There were sixteen students who participated in this project and twenty parents showed up for the initial meeting with their children.

After the parents were briefed and signed permission slips, they were dismissed. The participating students consisted of: one eleven-year-old, two twelve-year-olds, three thirteen-year-olds, two fourteen-year-olds, two fifteen-year-olds, two sixteen-year-olds, two seventeen-year-olds, two eighteen-year-olds, and one nineteen-year-old were giving the materials and surveys for the project. Once the information was given and explained to the students, there were a few questions about the project moving forward. That was the completion of session one. Appendix B includes a copy of the pre-evaluation given to the students.

### *Fieldtrip One*

“No one has ever become poor by giving.”<sup>2</sup> Through this quote, we wanted the students to understand where true wealth comes from. It is not a matter of what one has or do not have, rather it is a matter of what one gives.

On our first fieldtrip outing on June 8, 2019, we went to a homeless shelter in St. Petersburg. The homeless shelter is comprised of men, women, and children. The predominance of the residents are single women. The second predominance are single men, and then there are a small number of children. The students prepared and served lunch to fifty residents of the shelter. For most of the students this was an opportunity for them to reflect and be grateful for their blessings and benefits.

### *Session Two*

“No, no, we are not satisfied and will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream.”<sup>3</sup> Session two quote shows one of the greatest speeches ever given to promote social change; but it was said by a religious figure who used Bible poetry to make the moment live.

Session two of the project took place on June 9, 2019 at (MZPMBCYB), in this session, we focused on our student’s spiritual connectedness by teaching on Amos 5:21-24 and Luke 4:18. In both of these scriptures, there is clear evidence of the people being spiritually connected to God but also socially responsible. Through teaching, examples, and question and answering, we discussed being spiritually connected. The students were

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<sup>2</sup> Anne Frank, *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Martin L. King Jr., “I Have a Dream” (speech, Lincoln Memorial, Washington, DC, August 28, 1963).

very receptive during this session. The quote of the day brought about a great dialogue and discussion because they had never thought about how Dr. King used the Bible in that moment. They were able to see that moment clearer after this session.

The next is an agenda from session two, but it was also used for other sessions.

6:00-6:15: Arrival

6:15-6:30: Snacks and Talk Time

6:30-7:30: Gather in Groups

- Discuss Quote of the Session and Discussion
- Facilitator Gives Group Lesson
- Question and Answer Time

7:30: Dismiss

### *Session Three*

The facilitator used a scripture during this session as the quote in order to show the importance of being spiritually connected. He wanted to highlight for the students the fact that one cannot just be socially conscious either, rather the spiritually connected is as important. The students were shown how intertwined our lives are to Jesus and without Jesus we can do nothing. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5).

Session three was held on June 12, 2019 and was comprised of completing our discussions on being spiritually connected. We highlighted Matthew the twenty-fifth chapter as a backdrop for our discussion. We wanted the students to see how important feeding, clothing, giving to drink, and visiting is to the spiritual connectedness of the



believer. The students were engaged and asked a great deal of questions during this time as well as gave their opinions openly.

### *Fieldtrip Two*

The quote “To care for those who once cared for us is one of the highest honors” was used for the second fieldtrip.<sup>4</sup> The facilitator wanted to show the students the importance of taking care of those among us who are grown old in age. The students were challenged to see these individuals as their grandparents, parents, or even themselves one day. The facilitator also challenged the students to see that these elderly human beings were special to someone and had taken care of others throughout their lives and now is in need of someone caring for them.

Fieldtrip two took place on June 15, 2019 with a visit to a local nursing home. The students wrote encouraging notes to the residents in hopes of making them smile or extend some degree of happiness. They visited their rooms, and held a worship service where we sung, prayed, and the facilitator gave a brief message. The students ended their visit with fellowship with the residents.

Below is the agenda from fieldtrip two. The agenda was the same for most of the fieldtrips that the students participated in.

6:00-6:15: Arrival

6:15-6:30: Prayer and Talk Time

6:30-7:30: Gather in Groups

- Discuss Quote of the Session and Discussion

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<sup>4</sup> Peggi Speers and Tia Walker, *The Inspired Caregiver: Finding Joy While Caring for Those You Love* (Monterey, CA: Flowspirations LLC, 2013).

- Go Out to Complete Mission Project
- Gather Back
- Question and Answer Time

7:30: Dismiss

#### *Session Four*

The quote used for session four stated “treat the people’s needs as holy.”<sup>5</sup> The chosen quote for this session was designed to get the students to think different about meeting the social needs of people. The facilitator wanted to examine what they considered to be holy. Most of the students considered “holy things” to be those things that related to church or worship, but the facilitator wanted to show how things like visiting nursing homes were also holy acts.

Session four took place on June 19, 2019 at (MZPMBCYB). During this session the focus was on being socially conscious. We introduced passages from Obrey Hendricks book *The Politics of Jesus* to give the students an image of a historical Jesus who was all about pushing and practicing justice in the world. I wanted to highlight the importance of following Jesus in the way that he led.

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<sup>5</sup> Obrey Hendricks, *The Politics of Jesus: Rediscovering the True Revolutionary Nature of Jesus' Teachings and How They Have Been Corrupted* (New York, NY: Doubleday Religion, 2006), 331.

### *Session Five*

“Take your Bible and take your newspaper, and read both. But interpret newspapers from your Bible.”<sup>6</sup> The facilitator used this quote to show the students that the responsible interpretation and sharing of the gospel is with both the Bible and the newspaper. One must be concerned with things of God but also things of man. One must take up heavenly concerns as well as earthly ones.

Session five took place on June 19, 2019 at (MZPMBCYB). This session was a continuation of our socially conscious emphasis. During this time, we discussed ways of being more socially conscious. Using the backdrop of current events, we challenged the students to give creative ideas on how they can use their spiritual identity to help change their communities by addressing injustice.

### *Fieldtrip Three*

Although Matthew 25:35-40 was mentioned in session three, the facilitator wanted to highlight it further during this fieldtrip as the student were in the process of actively feeding the hungry. The facilitator wanted to make the scriptures real for the students in the midst of their labor.

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me’ (Matt. 25:35-40).

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<sup>6</sup> Karl Barth, “Religion: Witness to an Ancient Truth,” *Time Magazine*, April 1962, Time.com, accessed December 1, 2019, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,873557,00.html>.

Fieldtrip three was to a feeding program in our community. The students sorted and organized food to be giving away at this food pantry. When people came, they loaded the different items into their boxes in assembly line fashion and helped carry the boxes to the cars of the community members.

### *Session Six*

“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, ‘What are you doing for others?’”<sup>7</sup>

The facilitator chose this quote for this session because it was the beginning of bridging the gap between what they had learned spiritually and socially. The facilitator chose to use a figure that so brilliantly merged the two realms together.

Session six was held on June 23, 2019 at (MZPMBCYB). This focus of this session was to bridge a gap between being spiritually connected and socially conscious. We sought to do this by introducing my historical and theological research themes for them to examine. The goal was to highlight groups of people and periods of time where there was a clear and strong bridge between someone’s spiritual connectedness and their social consciousness. We examined the Religious Society of Friends or Quakers and The Social Gospel Movement. The students were originally unfamiliar with either one but when we connected the dots for them by sharing things like the Quakers helped Harriet Tubman on the Underground Railroad or The Social Gospel Movement helped to free slaves after the Civil War, it opened their eyes.

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<sup>7</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., *Strength to Love* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1963), 72.

### *Session Seven*

Although a long quote, the facilitator wanted to use this quote from the theological foundation chapter to highlight Howard Thurman's thoughts on how the work of the church has changed. I wanted the participants to see while watching this mini-series that the church has to return to its original mission of looking out for the disenfranchised.

I do not ignore the theological and metaphysical interpretation of the Christian doctrine of salvation. But the underprivileged everywhere have long since abandoned any hope that this type of salvation deals with the crucial issues by which their days are turned into despair without consolation. The basic fact is that Christianity as it was born in the mind of this Jewish teacher and thinker appears as a technique of survival for the oppressed. That it became, through the intervening years, a religion of the powerful and the dominant, used sometimes as an instrument of oppression, must not tempt us into believing that it was thus in the mind and life of Jesus. "In him was life; and the life was the light of men." Wherever his spirit appears, the oppressed gather fresh courage; for he announced the good news that fear, hypocrisy, and hatred, the three hounds of hell that track the trail of the disinherited, need have no dominion over them.<sup>8</sup>

Session seven was held on June 26, 2019 at (MZPMBCYB). This was an extended session. During this session the students watched the newly released four-part mini-series called "When They See Us." This was a time for them to witness in cinema fashion the true injustice that exist in the world. We had discussions after the series to determine what a Christian who is spiritually connected should do socially to practice justice in the world. This was a powerful session.

### *Fieldtrip Four*

The students were allowed to choose their own quote for the last fieldtrip and use it for peer discussion. The fieldtrip four took place on June 29, 2019 at a local food and

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<sup>8</sup> Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1976), 143.

clothing pantry. The students sorted both food and clothing to give away later that morning. After they sorted the clothes, they assisted the community in clothing selections, food distribution, and assistance in getting the items to individual's vehicle.

### *Session Eight*

The students were challenged to choose their own quote for the last session and bring it in for peer discussion. Session eight was held on June 30, 2019 at (MZPMBCYB). This session was our wrap up and final session. We invited members of our congregation and community to participate in a town hall meeting where the students could ask questions about their feelings with regards to their spiritual identity and their social activity. After the town hall meeting, everyone was dismissed except the students. The students were then given an ending survey to complete concerning the four-week project.

### **Summary of Learning**

In order for this project to be completed successfully, I felt that it was important for all of the test and evaluations to be done completely and as honestly as possible. After the weeks of research and actual field study, we collected and reviewed the data. The goal of this project was to have students see the need of committing to becoming more socially conscious as a result of their spiritual connectedness. My gauge of success in this process would have to be that at least one more than half of the group committing to being more socially conscious. The project had sixteen participants, in order to measure success, at least nine of the students would need to make this commitment. The

commitment could be gauged by the answering of a question that was added to the post-test. That question is as follows: Having participated in this project, how likely are you to make a lifelong commitment to being spiritual and social as it relates to your Christian identity?

The students were then giving five options to help answer the question. They are as follows: (5) I will commit, (4) Very Likely to commit, (3) Likely to commit, (2) Unlikely to commit, (1) I will not commit. After the surveys were collected and examined, it showed that ten students said that they would commit to being spiritual and social in their Christian identity, four students said that they are very likely to commit to being spiritual and social, and two students said that they were likely to commit to being spiritual and social.

Table 1. Post-test responses on commitment to social consciousness

	5 - I will commit	4 - Very likely to commit	3 – Likely to commit	2 – Unlikely to commit	1 – I will not commit
Student Responses	10	4	2	0	0

These numbers were comprised of the following age demographics. Out of the ten students who said that they would commit, one was eleven, one was twelve, two were thirteen, one was fourteen, one was fifteen, two were sixteen, one was eighteen, and one was nineteen. Out of the students who said they were very likely to commit, one was twelve, one was fourteen, one was seventeen, and one was eighteen. Out of the students who said they were likely to commit; one was fifteen and one was seventeen.

Table 2. Demographics for post-test responses on commitment to social consciousness

Student Ages	5 - I will commit	4 - Very likely to commit	3 – Likely to commit	2 – Unlikely to commit	1 – I will not commit
11	x				
12	x	X			
13	xx				
14	x	X			
15	x		x		
16	xx				
17		X	x		
18	x	x			
19	x				

These numbers suggest that the participants in this project were greatly affected by the project outcome. It seems that when we built a bridge of connectivity between them being spiritually connected and socially conscious that the students not only recognized its importance; but they also decided to implement it as a part of their Christian identity and formation. This is even more profound because the pre-evaluation showed that there was no real connection for students as it relates to them connecting the spiritual and social. The following questions were asked in the pre-evaluation:

1. Do you feel there is a connection between being a follower of Jesus and you helping people who are struggling socially?
2. How long have you been a follower of Jesus?
3. How long have you been feeding and clothing people?
4. Have you ever considered the social aspect of Jesus's ministry?



### 5. What will or did you receive from this training?

From these questions we received the following answers:

Table 3. Pre-evaluation survey responses

	YES	NO	1-2	2-3	3+
Question 1	xxxxxx (6)	xxxxxxxxxxx (10)			
Question 2			xx (2)	xxxx (4)	xxxxxxxxxxx (10)
Question 3			xxxxxxxxxxxxx (12)	xxx (3)	x (1)
Question 4	xx (2)	xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx (14)			
Question 5					

As shown in the table, these are students who are followers of Jesus and most of them more than three years; but a majority of them do not feel there is a connection between being a follower of Jesus and helping people who are struggling socially and even less of them have considered the social aspect of Jesus's ministry. It seems that although a strong emphasis is being put on students in church being spiritually connected by having a relationship with Jesus; but the same emphasis is not being put on them being socially conscious. I believe that we must do a better job at making this important connection for students in ministry.

My hypothesis was that if we invested in students by taking the time to make them spiritually connected and socially conscious then they would in turn positively impact their communities. This project results exceeded my predicted expectations. There was a complete eye-opening experience for our students who went through these four weeks of extensive training. They grew to the place of becoming followers of Jesus in the way that Jesus led. It seems that if we take the time to train our students to be

spiritually connected and socially conscious then they will take on the mantle in going about to do the ministry of Jesus and change their communities.

Although I would consider this project to be successful by all evidence, that does not mean the project was without challenges. The biggest challenge was consistency. It was the belief of the facilitator that no work could be done if the students were not there to receive the information or the experience of the trainings and fieldtrips. There had to be a very strong effort on behalf of the facilitator, his staff, and the parents to ensure that all sixteen students were present at each session and on fieldtrips. This goal was made more difficult because of the summer season. The students that participated in this project were off from school for summer break so making the four-week commitment clear in the first session and then having students honor that commitment proved to be difficult. However, each student did participate in every session and did come to each fieldtrip outing.

### **Conclusion**

This doctoral project is a culmination of three years of work towards an unknown conclusion. After reflecting on and sharing my spiritual autobiography and examining my context, it became crystal clear of the need to conduct this research. My biblical, historical, theological, and theoretical foundation chapters only gave validation to what I felt inside concerning my work during this process. From the beginning of this journey with my spiritual autobiography, literally was building brick on top of brick to hopefully build a house that is necessary for the future of the church. Every chapter and my work went towards this end, but I could not be sure if there would be a house until it withstood

the project winds. The project brought complete proof to the idea that if the church is to be a revival, in a very real and relevant way, then it will be done from the bottom up and not the top down. It also showed that this revival will happen only if the most precious in the kingdom are taught that fore stated revival can only happen when there is a marrying of the spiritual and social in the formation of Christian identity.

As I reflect on this project, it is clear that this work should be expanded beyond this point. There should be future work done to give this research to students in ministry across the country and the world. I believe that this work should not only be a four-week project but if it is to have real impact it has to become the identity of a student ministry meaning that threading the spiritual and social cannot be something that you do not do in ministry rather it has to become your ministry. If this would happen on a larger scale, then I do believe that it will bring a greater level of growth and development in the lives of students by turning them into true disciples while also bringing life back to the church. We must do the work of training students to be spiritually connected and socially conscious so that they can positively impact their communities.

**APPENDIX A**  
**PROJECT PERMISSION SLIP**

## SPIRITUALLY CONNECTED and SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS PROJECT

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this project that will in part fulfil the Doctor of Ministry requirements for my course study. Your honesty in participation is very important. If at any point you feel that you no longer wish to participate in this project, you or your parent may stop your participation. This project is designed to train you how to bridge a gap between you being spiritually connected to Jesus and your social responsibility. As a result of this, you will be expected to go to homeless shelters, food banks, clothing centers and shelters. In each of these places, you will have no direct physical contact with any adults in these programs but may have visual contact. Please with your parents fill out this form.

Full Name \_\_\_\_\_ DOB \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Information \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Full Name \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Contact Information \_\_\_\_\_

Emergency Contact \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

**Medical Information:**

Do you have any medical conditions that we should be aware of, especially those that would prevent you from participating in this project? Please list

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Doctor Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Any Medications \_\_\_\_\_

I give permission for my child/youth to participate in the project, event and activities listed above (unless noted) and authorize the adult leaders supervising this event to administer emergency treatment to the above-named participant for any accident or illness and to act in my stead in approving necessary medical care. This authorization shall cover this event and travel to and from this event. The participant is responsible for his or her own conduct and is aware of and agrees to abide by Church standards, camp, or event safety rules and other pertinent instructions. Participants' conduct and interactions should abide by Church standards and exemplify Christ like behavior. Parents and participants should understand that participation in an activity is not a right but a privilege that can be revoked if they behave inappropriately or if they pose a risk to themselves or others.

Student Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX B**  
**PROJECT PRE-EVALUATION**

**Doctor of Ministry Project Pre-Evaluation**

Thank you for your participation in this project. Please answer the following questions with complete honesty. Please circle the one that apply best to you.

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Project Number: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Do you feel there is a connection between being a follower of Jesus and you helping people who are struggling socially? Yes          No
2. How long have you been a follower of Jesus? 1-2 Years    2-3 Years  
3 Years or More
3. How long have you been feeding and clothing people? 1-2 Years  
2-3 Years      3 Years or More
4. Have you ever considered the social aspect of Jesus's ministry? Yes No
5. What will or did you receive from this training?



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